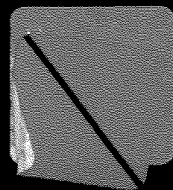


Volume 30 Number 3 Summer 1989 £4.95/\$9.50

SCREEN

INCORPORATING SCREEN EDUCATION



INDIAN AND EUROPEAN MELODRAMA

INTRODUCTION

The last few years have seen melodrama come to the forefront of debates in film and television studies, marked in particular by the publication of Christine Gledhill's anthology *Home Is Where The Heart Is* and Mary Ann Doane's study of the Hollywood Woman's Film of the 1940s, *The Desire to Desire*, both in 1987¹. Gledhill's essay 'The Melodramatic Field' in her anthology, as well as John Fletcher's introduction to a recent issue of *Screen*² excellently map out the theoretical and critical field of the genre, from the French and British stage melodrama of the late 18th century and early 19th century to the American domestic film melodrama of the 1950s, and beyond to television soap opera. Curiously, in view of the European origins of the genre, studies of melodrama have overwhelmingly addressed Hollywood; yet melodrama has always formed an important part of European, Latin American, and Indian cinema, to mention the most obvious. This state of affairs has as much to do with practical problems (such as availability of prints) as with the endemic Americano-centrism of film studies, and it seems proper to try and begin to redress the balance by addressing non-American melodrama.

Studying non-Hollywood cinema – in the context of Anglo-American studies, that is – presents two immediate problems: first of all the films tend to be unknown or little-known and a higher degree of factual information, plot summaries, etc, is necessary. More crucially, a cultural context has to be addressed. Secondly, the analyses have to contend with critical and theoretical tools whose usefulness is not doubted, but which have been fashioned in relation to Hollywood cinema. In this issue, the articles by Richard Abel on domestic melodrama in early French cinema, by Ravi Vasudevan on popular Hindi cinema, as well as my own on French women's films of the 1930s, contend with this problematic in different ways.

Abel is particularly concerned with how Pathé domestic melodramas between 1905 and 1907 played a critical role in the emergence of a narrative paradigm in France; Vasudevan examines the peculiarities of narrative structure and narrative procedure, as well as the function of song and dance units in the Hindi commercial cinema, focusing on the 1950s; my article is more culturally oriented, examining how some French women-centered films in the 1930s addressed a female audience, but also placing them in the context of the dominant realist aesthetics of the period. A number of books are also reviewed in this issue, either on non-Hollywood cinema, or on American melodrama.

The issue also contains two articles written as a response to Coco Fusco's 'Fantasies of Oppositionality' published in *Screen*³. We decided to publish both Yvonne Rainer's and Bérénice Reynaud's pieces in order to continue the important debate, initiated by Fusco's article, on multicultural arts programming and interracial collaboration. A shortened version of Yvonne Rainer's text is published in *Afterimage* (August 1989). I am informed by Bérénice Reynaud that at the time of writing, *Afterimage* refuses to publish her piece unless it is drastically reduced. I must stress that Coco Fusco's reply to Rainer's and Reynaud's articles was kept short for reasons of space in the issue and with her original agreement.

GINETTE VINCENTEAU

¹ Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Film*, London, BFI, 1987; Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1987.

² *Screen*, vol 29, no 3, Summer 1988

³ *Screen*, vol 29, no 4, Autumn 1988



'The archetypal lost girl': Michèle Morgan in *Quai des brumes*: French Women's Films in the 1930s, page 51

SCENES FROM DOMESTIC LIFE IN EARLY FRENCH CINEMA¹

BY RICHARD ABEL

¹ Shorter versions of this essay were presented as lectures at the University of Tennessee (27 January 1989), the National Humanities Centre (20 February 1989), and Duke University (22 March 1989).

² See Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill, London, BFI, 1987, 5-39; John Fletcher, 'Melodrama - An Introduction.' *Screen* Vol 29, no 3, Summer 1988, 2-12; Thomas Elsaesser, 'Desire Defined, Deferred, or Squared (review of Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire*, Indiana University Press, 1987) *Screen* vol 29 no 3, (Summer 1988), 106-115; and Rick Altman, 'Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88.2 (Spring 1989), 321-359.

FILM MELODRAMA: that 'floating signifier' through which a generation of film theorists and historians has opened up a continuing debate over such interrelated epistemological categories as genre, ideology, representation and narration, subjectivity, spectatorship, and, crossing them all, gender difference.² In an effort to further place that debate historically, I want to give special attention to that moment, between 1905 and 1907, when the 'melodramatic mode' first came to prominence in early French cinema through the production of Pathé-Frères, specifically through what the company called its genre of 'dramatic and realist' films. And, within that genre, I am particularly interested in the company's domestic melodramas - 'scenes of domestic life,' Rémy de Gourmont called them, in 1907, which, 'consume[d] the public with a passion.'³ More precisely, I want to consider some dozen surviving prints of these Pathé films, along with selected others for comparison, according to a double line of inquiry. My principal concern is with the development of a narrative cinema paradigm in opposition to an earlier 'cinema of attractions' during this period, and with the specific contribution these films made to its newly emerging system of representation and narration. Closely related to that, however, is a concern with corresponding changes in reference and audience, as that paradigm developed, and with how these films constructed relations of difference in terms of class and gender, which were implicated in specific social processes defining Third Republic France.

In order to initiate this inquiry, let me sketch Pathé's position within the French cinema industry, offer a summary definition of both the cinema of attractions and the narrative cinema paradigms, and then lay out an analytical framework for interrogating those 'scenes from domestic life' within the genre of Pathé's dramatic and realist films. Between 1904 and 1907, the French cinema industry and its products' dominant mode of representation, underwent a radical, reciprocal transformation. Pathé initiated the move into mass production, building

an 'image factory' of new studios and laboratories (at Vincennes, Joinville-le-pont, and Montreuil) in order to expand the markets for its commodities in both France and elsewhere.⁴ In an apparent attempt to standardise and exert greater control over that production, the company turned increasingly, and successfully, from *actualités* to story films.⁵ By 1905, Pathé was selling 200 cameras per month and 12,000 meters of positive filmstock per day; within another year, its distribution agencies had spread out into most of the world's trade centers, and sales of positive film prints tripled.⁶ In France itself, complete programmes of films (most of them now story films, from Pathé) were firmly established in the growing number of *fêtes foraines* or street fair cinemas (some of which were starting to settle permanently in town squares), and individual spectacle or story films were being featured ever more often on music hall and café-concert programmes.⁷ The pressure of mass production, along with the desire to control the profitable circulation of products, would finally, in 1906-1907, compel Pathé to begin restructuring film distribution and exhibition within France – through the construction of a circuit of permanent cinemas and the shift from selling to renting films (almost the exact opposite of what was occurring in the United States, where it was exhibition that fuelled production, according to Charles Musserl)⁸. But, before that step of 'legitimation' would be taken, the company's filmmakers would already be working within a transformed system of representation and narration.

The cinema of attractions, to use Tom Gunning's formulation⁹ (rather than the unfortunate 'primitive cinema') is perhaps the best term to describe the *otherness* of the cinema's dominant mode of representation prior to this period. It had at least four principal components. First, early cinema was presentational – that is, rather than narrate, it tended to display either the technical possibilities of the new medium or the spectacle of human figures, landscapes, and studio decors, or both. Second, each shot or tableau generally was assumed to be autonomous; in other words, the shot's objective, according to André Gaudreault, was 'to present not a small *temporal* segment of action but rather the totality of an action unfolding in an *homogeneous* space.'¹⁰ And within that space, characters were depicted exclusively in terms of gestures or behaviour. Third, early cinema tended to address the spectator directly, not only through the presentational mode of display, but also through the recurring looks actors gave to the camera in order to create a further degree of collaboration between spectator and film.¹¹ And, fourth, early cinema assumed a wide range of textual variance, the very opposite of anything like a definitive film text. All kinds of practices – variable projection speed (due to hand cranking), music and sound effects accompanying the film images, *bonisseurs* or commentators providing explanations, exhibitors asserting the right to re-edit and colour the film prints they purchased – actively promoted the transformation of film products into continually changing performance texts.¹²

The cinema of attractions paradigm particularly defined the more

³ Rémy de Gourmont, 'Epilogues: Cinématographe', *Mercur de France* (1 September 1907) – reprinted in English translation in Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: 1907-1929; A History/Anthology*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, 48.

⁴ The best early sources for information on Pathé-Frères' developments are 'Informations financières: Pathé-Frères', *Phono-Ciné-Gazette*, 77 (1 June 1908), 614-615; and R Binet and G Haussier, *Les Sociétés de cinématographe*, Paris: La France Economique et Financière, 1908, 14-29.

⁵ Georges Sadoul has argued that Pathé's comic chase films, for instance, cost even less to make on average than its *actualités*, which may well have contributed to this shift to story films – Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma, II: L'Epoque Pathé, 1903-1909*, Paris, Denoël, 1948, 224.

⁶ See, for instance, the inserted Pathé ad in *Phono-Ciné-Gazette*, 40, (15 November 1906), as well as 'Informations financières: Pathé-Frères', 631.

⁷ The best sources of information on early French cinema exhibition are Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma, II*, 117-128, 335-346; and Jacques Deslandes and

Jacques Richard, *Histoire comparée du cinéma, II*, Paris; Casterman, 1968, 83-250.

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- ⁸ Charles Musser, 'The Nickelodeon Era Begins: Establishing the Framework for Hollywood's Mode of Representation', *Framework*, 22/23 (1983), 4.
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- ⁹ Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, 8.3/4 (1986), 63-70.
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- ¹⁰ André Gaudreault, 'Temporality and Narrativity in Early Cinema, 1895-1908', in *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983, 322.
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- ¹¹ See, especially, Miriam Hansen, 'Reinventing the Nickelodeon: Notes on Kluge and Early Cinema' *October* 46 (Fall 1988), 187. See, also, Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (forthcoming from Harvard University Press).
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- ¹² This catalogue of practices is drawn principally from Vincent Pinel, 'La Restauration des films', *La Cinémathèque française*, 4 December 1985), 8-14; Jacques Malthête, 'Les Bandes cinématographiques en couleurs artificielles. Un exemple: les films de Georges Méliès coloriés à la main'

popular of the early French film genres. It was within the 'transformation' genre of trick films and *féeries*, for instance, that Georges Méliès worked out his own distinctive form of a cinema of attractions.¹³ For Méliès, a film's scenario never amounted to much because it merely served as a 'pretext' for *trucs* or tricks and/or 'striking tableaux'. In fact he claimed that in preparing a film his first task always was to come up with a series of magical tricks, a central 'grand effect,' and a final high spot of the spectacle. As a representative figure of the period, Méliès saw himself, not as a story-teller, but rather, in the music hall tradition, as an innovative composer of cinematic *revues*. Pathé generally followed Méliès's lead in its own production of trick films and *féeries* and then extended the cinema of attractions paradigm into other genres such as the biblical and historical film – for instance, *La Vie et la Passion de N S Jésus-Christ* (1902-1905) and *Epopée Napoléonienne* (1903). And the *tableau vivant* style of these films was heavily determined by such prior cultural practices as the Saint-Sulpice iconography of the Catholic Church, the French tradition of historical painting, and the 'realisation' of such paintings as spectacular tableaux on the 19th-century French stage.¹⁴

The mass production and marketing which Pathé pioneered between 1904 and 1907 coincided with a shift away from the cinema of attractions to a narrative cinema paradigm. Here, spectacle attractions were subordinated to and incorporated within a causal narrative chain whose governing principle of unified action was perhaps best exemplified by the prior model of the short story yet whose 'logic' depended greatly on the coincidence of 19th-century melodrama. As a corollary, attractions were 'remotivated' within a continuous flow of action across a number of discrete shots, whose interrelation (rather than autonomy) constructed a more or less unified spatial-temporal continuum.¹⁵ And that interrelation depended on positioning the viewer differently – actively engaging the spectator in 'stitching' together a synthetic spatial whole according to a narrative logic. Moreover, this shift began, at least in France, well before any serious attempts were made to recruit a specifically bourgeois audience – for instance, through constructing permanent cinemas and 'film d'art' productions. Simply put, the French cinema now began to privilege its ability to tell stories within a paradigm that allowed for a similar or even greater degree of product standardisation as well as differentiation. And it did so, in the public sphere of *fêtes foraines* and music halls, to a relatively mixed mass audience according to class, gender, and generation – although still weighted, at least initially, toward petit-bourgeois and working-class or artisan men.¹⁶

As a number of early cinema historians have argued, this emerging narrative cinema paradigm was much less homogeneous, at least in its beginnings, than was the cinema of attractions paradigm. Historians such as Barry Salt and Kristin Thompson, for instance, have been primarily concerned with tracing the development – and privileging the achievement – of the continuity system which ultimately came to

dominate the American cinema during the late 1910s.¹⁷ Others such as Ben Brewster, Charles Musser, and Tom Gunning, however, have focused more closely on the early period of transition from the cinema of attractions to a narrative cinema.¹⁸ Both Musser and Gunning, for instance, have proposed somewhat different models for the latter's emergence, particularly in the American cinema, outlining various strategies of representation and narration which enabled companies to make stories efficient or economical in the 'telling' and comprehensible to a relatively broad-based audience. In what follows, I certainly assume some of the strategies outlined in their work – such as the continued reliance on audience familiarity (deriving films from already well-known stories, comic strips, and newspaper or magazine articles), the increasing use of intertitles to introduce scenes (which Pathé pioneered around 1902–1903), and the 'structuring principle of repetition' in the chase film. However, I want to take up strategies other than those they have elucidated so well. Specifically, I want to examine the particular terms of transformation – both textual and intertextual – that gradually subordinated spectacle to narrative in the French cinema or, more precisely, in a range of Pathé films produced between 1905 and 1907.

My research on surviving Pathé film prints from this period, supplemented by the few Gaumont films still extant, suggests that several simultaneous, yet relatively distinct models of transformation developed to negotiate between the interests of spectacle attractions and narrative continuity. Let me call them the redundancy model; the alternation model; and (for want of a better term) the compound model, which involved a range of strongly-bonded changes in framing. The redundancy and alternation models each came to define, at least initially, a particular film genre from among the dozen the Pathé company advertised – the comic chase film and the stag film. And all quickly coalesced into a loose system of representation and narration in perhaps the most significant of Pathé genres, the dramatic and realist film, and especially its domestic melodramas. To some extent, then, the transition to a narrative cinema in France can be mapped according to the generic distinctions marking Pathé's film production. However, within the genre of dramatic and realist films, the referential body of Third Republic social relations on which that system worked consistently hinged on such concepts as the criminally or morally deviant as well as family relations, and quite often on their structural opposition. In fact, those relations tended to coalesce around a particular set of binary oppositions – bourgeois/deviant, public/private, male/female – all of which provided crucial axes of subject construction for the existing French social order. While narrative transgression within the genre could sometimes interrogate those relations, its principal function was to reproduce and legitimise that order – almost in parallel with Pathé's own desire for legitimation – through circulation as much as containment. As an ideological form of emerging influence, then, the early narrative cinema in France can be seen as mapped onto a specific historical site of social relations of difference.¹⁹

1895 (1987), 3–4; and Paolo Cherchi Usai, 'The Unfortunate Spectator' *Sight and Sound*, 56 (Summer 1987), 170–173.

¹³ See, for instance, Georges Méliès, 'Les Vues cinématographiques', *Annuaire général et international de la photographie* (Paris: Plon, 1907) – reprinted in English translation in Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 38–39.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1983, 201–228; Joseph Marty, 'Quelques Problèmes de représentation religieuse soulevés par des films bibliques primitifs Pathé,' in *Les Premiers Ans du cinéma français*, ed. Pierre Guibbert, Perpignan, Institut Jean Vigo, 1985), 167–171; and Abel, 'Pathé's *Napoléon*: A Film for Five Seasons, or the Irreparably Multiple Film Text,' Society for Cinema Studies Conference, Bozeman, Montana, 2 July 1988.

¹⁵ This definition is drawn, in part, from Gaudreault, 'Temporality and Narrativity in Early Cinema', 323. See, also, David Bordwell, 'Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures,' in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen, New York, Columbia University Press,

¹⁶ For some sense of mass culture practices, and audiences, which established a context for the early cinema in Third Republic France, see TJ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, 9-10, 202-204, 234-238; Charles Resnick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, 81-115, 167-195; and Eugen Weber, *France. Fin-de-Siècle*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, 159-176.

¹⁷ Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, London, Starword, 1983, 51-82; and Kristin Thompson, 'The Formulation of the Classical Hollywood Style, 1909-1928,' in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985, 157-240.

¹⁸ Musser, 'The Nickelodeon Era Begins,' 4-11; Tom Gunning, 'Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity: A Theory of Genres in

The first successful model of transformation developed, arguably, in the comic chase film. This model worked simply on what Musser has called the principle of redundancy or 'repetition with slight variation.'²⁰ Rather than accumulate a variety of genre elements around a unifying action or theme – as in the *bricolage* format exemplified by *Un Drame dans les airs* (1904) or *Un Tour du monde d'un policier* (1906)²¹ – it constructed a 'synthetic space' through a series of loosely linked shots in which one character was pursued by another (or else a host of others), each of which repeatedly moved into and out of one frame after another in a continuous line of action. Chase films, as Victorin Jasset was one of the first to point out,²² seem to have originated in the British and American cinemas,²³ but Pathé and then Gaumont quickly picked up on their popularity. This model superseded both companies' earlier strategy of having the comic musical hall routine performed within an autonomous shot-scene and allowed the simplest of stories to be extended clearly and efficiently into quite marketable film lengths, without the need for either inserted intertitles or an exhibitor's commentary. And it was economical – whole films could be shot easily and cheaply on location.

The earliest surviving copy of a Pathé comic chase film is probably *Dix Femmes pour un mari* (1905),²⁴ which obviously derives from either Biograph's *Personal* (1904) or Edison's plagiarised version, *How a French Nobleman Got a Wife Through the New York Herald Personal Columns* (1904). Much like its predecessors, this film begins with a simple narrative premise: a man advertises in a newspaper for a wife and sets up a rendezvous site for any prospective candidates. When he arrives, however, he finds ten women waiting, which then prompts his flight and their pursuit through the rest of the film. Similar premises mark a series of Pathé films over the next year or so.²⁵ *La Course à la perruque* (1906),²⁶ for instance, has some boys attach a bunch of balloons to the hat of an old woman sitting on a park bench, after which the balloons sail off bearing not only the hat but a wig as well. These comic chases followed an easily replicated pattern in which obstacle after obstacle confronted both pursued and pursuers. Again, in *La Course à la perruque*, with the furious woman and a crowd in hot pursuit, the hat and wig fly over woods and fields, cross the Seine, enter an apartment window, and finally escape up a fireplace chimney. Even one of the earliest surviving Gaumont films, *Un Coup de vent* (1906),²⁷ works a variation on this chase by having a man come out of a Paris railway station, lose his hat in a gust of wind, and then futilely pursue it in and around a river barge, a multi-tiered fountain, a sidewalk café, and a coal loading site.

In order to keep these stories clear and simple, the comic chase film made most of its characters into easily recognisable stereotypes – for instance, the strolling bourgeois, the artisan at work, the maid with baby carriage, the strutting soldier or gendarme, the 'country bumpkin' just arrived in the city. Through what happened to such stereotypes, of



Un Coup de vent (1906)

course, the genre also caricatured the so-called levelling process considered to be a hallmark of Third Republic France; and it was particularly insistent on putting down women. Moreover, because circus acrobats and clowns usually played the pursuers in these films, often cross-dressed as women, their exaggerated pratfalls constantly interrupted the flow of movement and often kept them from ever catching their prey. Such obstacles and pratfalls provided, as Gunning suggests, 'mini-spectacle pauses in the unfolding of [the chase] narrative.'²⁸ Consequently, although the comic chase film certainly established a rudimentary form of linear continuity, involving the spectator in simply defined and quickly resolved narrative expectations, its popularity probably depended most on the 'spectacle attraction' of these repeated gags. Furthermore, the comic chase tended to encourage variety as much as consistency, from shot to shot, in 'suturing' the direction of movement across the frame and in characters' entrances and exits; and it often closed off rather arbitrarily. In *Un Coup de vent*, for instance, there is no compelling reason why the man should finally capture his hat in the coal pile – except for the racist joke of having him walk off in blackface. This arbitrariness was one crucial feature which carried over from the cinema of attractions and gave exhibitors a good deal of latitude in screening such films, perhaps almost as much as they had with *actualités*, for they could easily cut shots as well as rearrange them – the better to fit their programmes – and still maintain the narrative thread of the chase.

Early Film,' *Iris*, 2.1 (1984), 100-112. See, also, Gaudreault, 'Temporality and Narrativity in Early Cinema,' 311-329.

¹⁹ My formulation here, in general, assumes a cultural materialist rather than a psychoanalytic framework, and is indebted specifically to Robert A Nye, who is interested in 19th-century French cultural perceptions of deviance, and Jonathan Dollimore, who is particularly concerned with the subversive reinscription of transgression – see Nye, *Crimes, Madness, and Politics in Modern France*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984; and Dollimore, 'Homophobia and Sexual Difference' *Oxford Literary Review*, 8.1/2 (1986), 5-12. See, also Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field', 36-37.

²⁰ Musser, 'The Nickelodeon Era Begins,' 5-6.

²¹ Hansen refers briefly to such a film form, in 'Reinventing the Nickelodeon,' 192.

²² Victorin Jasset, 'Etude sur la mise-en-scène en cinématographie,' *Ciné-Journal*, 166 (28 October 1911) – reprinted in Marcel Lapiere, *Anthologie du Cinéma*, Paris, La Nouvelle Edition, 1946, 86-87.

²³ See, for example, Mottershaw's *A Daring Daylight Burglary* (1903),

Haggar's *Desperate Poaching Affray* (1903), Lubin's *Meet Me at the Fountain* (1904), and especially Biograph's *Personal* (1904) – Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 55–56; Gunning, 'Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity,' 108.

²⁴ National Film Archive 35mm print, 230 feet, no intertitles. English title: *Ten Women for one Husband*. Throughout this essay, specific film release dates are based on advertisements and listings in *The New York Clipper*, *L'Industriel forain*, *Phono-Ciné-Gazette*, *Moving Picture World*, and the 1907 Pathé-Frères catalogue.

²⁵ Other Pathé titles not discussed here include *Le Voleur des bicyclettes* (1906), *Jour de paye* (1906), *La Course des belles-mères* (1906–1907), *The Bathers' Race* (1906–1907), and *The Umbrella Chase* (1906–1907).

²⁶ Archive du Film (Bois d'Arcy) 16mm print. English title: *The Wig Chase*.

²⁷ National Film Archive 35mm print, 305 feet, no intertitles. English title: *A Gust of Wind*. Francis Lacassin once attributed this film to Etienne Arnaud and Louis Feuillade – see Lacassin, *Louis Feuillade* (Paris: Seghers, 1964), 165.

²⁸ Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction,' 68.

A second model of transformation, somewhat more unique to Pathé, was based on the principle of alternation. This developed most clearly out of Pathé's early stag films, which were constructed around the cinematic device of the point-of-view shot sequence.²⁹ Minimally, of course, the sequence was composed of at least two discrete shots: one of a person looking and another of what the person was looking at.³⁰ In the cinema of attractions paradigm, as Gunning argues, the continuing alternation of such sequences was governed by *ocularisation* rather than *focalisation* – the desire to put something on display for a spectator rather than construct a character within a narrative – so that their 'power [was] projective rather than absorptive, relishing hidden dramas and spectacles.'³¹ And what was seen or exposed in the point-of-view shot sequence served, in Brewster's words, as the principal 'pleasure point' of attraction, largely for a male clientele – perhaps another sign of the proportionately larger number of males in the early cinema audience.³² The early stag film thus turned the act of spectating itself into a deeply gendered spectacle and made the voyeuristic nature of the cinema all that much more explicit.³³ Many of Pathé's stag films placed a mischievous character (usually male) in the public space of either a hotel or an apartment building corridor, looking through door keyholes into different private spaces – see, for instance, *Peeping Tom* (1901) and *L'Amour à tous les étages* (1903).³⁴ In *Par le trou de la serrure* (1905),³⁵ one of the latest of these, three waist-level full-shots of a man peering through three doors on the same floor alternate with three middle shots (each framed in a keyhole mask) of what he sees in the separate rooms. While the first keyhole shot gives him a privileged view of a young

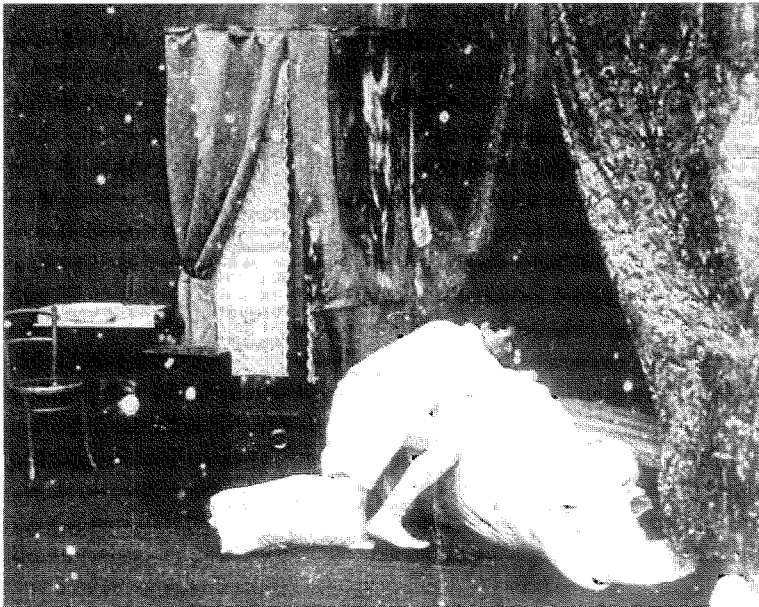
Un Coup d'oeil par étage (1904)



woman at her dressing table and the third lets him spy on a boy embracing a hefty, older woman, the second offers a 'deconstructive' striptease as a woman, getting ready for bed, removes her breasts (small sacks), nose, teeth, and wig. This series then ends with a comic, moralising twist as another man unexpectedly comes out of the fourth door, punches the voyeur, knocks him down the foreground stairs, and then throws a self-satisfied glance at the camera. As both Noël Burch and Gunning point out, such an overt act of repression at the end of these stag films – a kind of uncanny joke on the 'subjecting' power of surveillance – may well have provoked as much pleasure and laughter as did the views and antics of the voyeur.³⁶

Point-of-view shot sequences, of course, were not restricted to Pathé's stag films; and, as such sequences began to be incorporated into other film genres, a perceptible shift occurred in the point-of-view shot's function. *Un Coup d'oeil par étage* (1904),³⁷ advertised as a dramatic and realist film, exemplifies this shift from spectacle attraction to narrative revelation quite clearly. The first ten shots describe a situation analogous to that of *Par le trou de la serrure*. A concierge ascends the hallway stairs of a four-storey apartment building, making a pretence of dusting and delivering mail, but actually peering through the keyhole of a door on each floor. What he sees are three unrelated comic private scenes – a man angrily beating on a telephone at his desk, three children engaged in a pillow fight in their bedroom, and a woman whose cat is swishing its tail in her face. After each view, the concierge then comes to the centre foreground (as if on a public stage) and laughingly mimics what he has just seen. This series is unusually redundant – in the way the man

Un Coup d'oeil par étage (1904)



²⁹ See 'Scènes grivoises d'un caractère piquant,' *Films Pathé-Frères*, Paris: 1907, 163-168.

³⁰ For a thorough description and analysis of the point-of-view shot system, see Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narrativity and Subjectivity in the Classical Cinema*, New York: Mouton, 1984, 103-121.

³¹ Tom Gunning, 'What I Saw from the Rear Window of the Hôtel des Folies-Dramatiques, or the Story Point of View Films Told,' in André Gaudreault, ed, *Ce que je vois de mon ciné . . .* Paris, Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1988, 37-38. Gunning takes over this distinction between *ocularisation* and *focalisation* from François Jost, *L'Oeil-Caméra: Entre film et roman*, Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1987.

³² Ben Brewster, 'A Scene at the Movies,' *Screen* vol 23 no 2 (July-August 1982), 7. The question of where these films were shown remains to be answered; Emmanuelle Toulet, for instance, dates the earliest pornographic cinemas in Paris from 1906 – Toulet, *Le Spectacle cinématographique à Paris de 1895 à 1914*, Thèse de L'Ecole des Chartes (Sorbonne, 1982), 519-521.

³³ This poses an extremely pertinent question: why did the predominantly male

gaze of the spectacle stag film not become a crucial feature of the early narrative cinema paradigm, in either France or the US?

³⁴ For brief descriptions of these films, see *Films Pathé-Frères* (1907), 164; and André Gaudreault, ed, *Filmographie analytique (films de fiction), 1900-1906*, Brussels: FIAF, 1982; 83, 89-90. One exception to this pattern is the female voyeur in *La Fille de bain indiscrete* (1902).

³⁵ Archives du Film (Bois d'Arcy) 35mm print, 53 meters, no intertitles. English title *Through the Keyhole*.

³⁶ Noël Burch, 'How We Got into Pictures: Notes Accompanying *Correction Please*, *Afterimage*, 8/9 (1981), 36. Gunning, 'What I Saw from the Rear Window,' 38.

³⁷ Library of Congress 35mm print, 375 feet, no intertitles. English title: *Scenes at Every Floor*.

³⁸ National Film Archive 35mm print, 480 feet, no intertitles. English title: *Ephemeral Wealth*.

³⁹ Judith Mayne, 'The Two Spheres of Early Cinema,' *Private Novels, Public Films*, Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1988, 83.

traverses the frame, in the alternation of hallway and room interior shots, and in the double representation of the comedy. As the concierge reaches the fourth floor and peers in the garret room keyhole, however, the film changes radically. What he sees now is a young man desperately fighting a fire that has broken out in his room. The remaining six shots thus turn into a continuous narrative sequence of escape as the young man bursts out of the room and collapses, the concierge rushes back down the stairway, where he is joined by the people he has spied on at every floor, and they all finally reach the ground floor where several firemen are already working a pumping machine. *Un Coup d'oeil par étage* literally grafts one kind of cinema onto another to produce a single film. An initial series of comic private views suddenly turns into a melodramatic variation on the popular chase film. And the turning point comes precisely in the last point-of-view shot, in which the spectacle of a fire unexpectedly takes on a narrative function which generates the action in the rest of the film.

Eventually, the point-of-view-shot sequence's shift in function became apparent in Pathé's comic shorts as well. In *Richesse d'un jour* (1906),³⁸ for instance, the point-of-view shot sequence clearly had begun to lose its status as an attraction and taken on a more exclusively narrative function. This film narrates the story of a clochard who finds a wallet full of money, spends it all during a day (on clothing, gambling, women, and drink), and, confronted by the wallet's owner in a police station, presumably ends up in jail – a kind of comic Third Republic fable of social mobility in which one's status is measured by a certain style of consumption. A single point-of-view shot appears about midway through the film's nineteen shots as the newly attired clochard goes to bet on the horses at a racetrack. There, an *actualité* long shot of bunched horses racing around a fence turn merely seems at first to describe the location more specifically. But the next shot of the clochard standing in a crowd at the racetrack rail and looking through binoculars implies – through the direction of the clochard's look and the matching direction of the horses' movement across the frame – that the first image has been seen through the clochard's binoculars and that the horses are rounding the turn to the final stretch of their run. The two shots together generate narrative interest – will the horse the clochard has bet on win? Yet, just as important, they also produce a striking sense of verisimilitude that positions the clochard 'naturally' within a social milieu otherwise foreign to him. Unlike previous Pathé films, which displayed the point-of-view shot principally as spectacle, *Richesse d'un jour* clearly stresses its representational and narrative function. As Judith Mayne argues – and the argument certainly holds for these Pathé films – 'the articulation of space, particularly in terms of alternation, and the implicit assumption of point of view for the spectator, [would be] key features in the evolution of cinema as a narrative form.'³⁹

The final model I want to consider, the compound model, depended

on strongly-bonded changes in framing or camera position – whether through camera movement or through cutting to a different perspective of either the same space or else an immediately adjacent space. Somewhat in parallel to the chase film, this model provided a significant variation on what Gunning has called the ‘narrative of continuity’, in which disruptions resulting from cuts or camera movements were ‘naturalised’ by a narrative logic of action.⁴⁰ That is, they were remotivated within a continuous flow of action, not only to construct a synthetic space for that action, but also to elicit and fulfil narrative expectations. And the principal locus of the model’s development was Pathé’s dramatic and realist films, especially during the period of the company’s expansion in 1905-1906. Initially, the genre had sometimes turned on newspaper reports of class conflict, as in *La Grève* (1904).⁴¹ But now, as France entered a period of increasing strike activity in 1905-1906, such conflicts disappeared and were replaced by the threat of apache street gang crimes.⁴² Although most of those crimes were actually confined to the new working-class suburbs of Paris and other cities, the apache soon became a figure of fascination and revulsion – first in the period’s newspapers and then in the cinema – as a ‘universalised’ sign of random terror and violence. Thus was real social tension and conflict resolved through a process of condensation and displacement onto the most publicised deviant ‘other’ supposedly threatening the bourgeois social order.⁴³

This remotivation of frame changes in the genre can be tracked with surprising clarity by comparing certain pairs of surviving Pathé film prints. One such pair contrasts one kind of apache with another: *Indians and Cowboys* (1904),⁴⁴ which probably draws part of its story from Edison’s popular *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), and *Brigandage moderne* (1905).⁴⁵ *Indians and Cowboys* locates its threat quite literally in the exotic American West, where a so-called ‘Indian Marauder’ attacks a stagecoach, kidnapping a woman and child, who have to be rescued by a posse of cowboys and scouts in a climactic gun battle. Although shot entirely on location (perhaps in the Camargue region of France), this film generally adheres to the parameters of the cinema of attractions, illustrating its brief expository intertitles with long shot tableaux full of ‘authentic’ costumes and props. However, in a remarkably consistent strategy, nearly every one of these tableaux is marked by some kind of panning camera movement; and all but one have a clear narrative function. In the second tableau, for instance, a pan right reframes the passengers (entering left foreground) who get into the stagecoach before it exits right, then follows an Indian who suddenly emerges from hiding on a low building roof left centre background and runs off in pursuit. Similar pans help to narrate, first, the robbery of the stage by a band of outlaws (after which stage and outlaws exit in opposite directions) and, then, the attack by the Indians. Perhaps the most interesting occurs in the final tableau as the posse creeps out of a woods left background toward an Indian teepee right – now, a pan right reveals the object of

⁴⁰ Gunning, ‘Non-Continuity, Continuity, Discontinuity,’ 108.

⁴¹ For a short analysis of this film, see Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma*, II, 311.

⁴² For further information on labour strike activity in France during this period, see Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Rebérioux, *The Third Republic from its Origins to the Great War, 1871-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, 244-255; and Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France*, 182-184.

⁴³ A columnist for *Le Journal*, Arthur Dupin, first used the word apaches, to describe several street gangs of the working-class Paris suburbs, in 1902. The term circulated so widely that Robert Nye concludes that ‘bourgeois and crime’ constituted the ‘true binary opposition’ of the period – Nye *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France* 196-206.

⁴⁴ Library of Congress 35mm print, 558 feet, five English intertitles.

⁴⁵ National Film Archive 35mm print, 490 feet, no intertitles. English title: *Modern Highway Robbery*.

their quest: the woman and child sitting in the middle of the Indian camp. The use of camera movement to introduce off-screen space for narrative purposes certainly makes *Indians and Cowboys* a unique film for 1904, yet it is no less unusual for its explicit racism. Although the stage is attacked twice, only the Indians are pursued and punished – not only for killing several whites, but for abducting the woman and child and thus threatening figures crucial to the social order of the ‘colonisers’ – while the white outlaws simply ride off with their loot. Furthermore, because an Indian is whipped by the cowboys in the opening tableau, providing some justification for the later attack as revenge, only the initial intertitle labelling the Indian a villain secures, if somewhat tenuously, the boundaries separating victim from victimiser in the film.

Brigandage moderne (1905) offers perhaps an even more appropriate early example of this model because, in its much more sustained chase, the pursued apache is a ‘modern highwayman’ and the pursuers, the police. The narrative premise is set up in the opening shot, in the deep space of a country road, as a man on a motorbike stops an automobile in the foreground, robs its three wealthy passengers, and speeds off left foreground before a policeman on a bicycle can arrive from the far background. In contrast to the chases in Pathé’s comic films, this one takes a much more consistent course, following the parameters of the initial scene. Although the police pursue the apache on bikes and in cars through no more than four subsequent shots, the chase is accentuated (in all but one of them) by the spectacle effect of having the characters traverse extremely deep spaces. And both the thief and the police repeatedly move from the centre background or left background of these spaces toward either the right foreground or left foreground, in loosely matched entrances and exits. It is just this kind of regularity in the criminal pursuit film – a ‘disciplined’ mode of representation which works here to the advantage of the police (in the end, they get their man) – that would eventually establish the general principle of matching action or movement across adjacent or proximate spaces within a strict linear time frame.⁴⁶ Perhaps even more important in *Brigandage moderne*, however, is the cut-in occurring in the middle of the chase: in a middle shot, which matches action across the cut, one policeman, having shinnied up a roadside pole, talks into a phone he has patched into a telephone line.⁴⁷ At first, this might seem just a way to display, through magnification, the latest gadgetry for catching apaches (*à la* James Bond), but the phone call turns out to have a narrative purpose. It alerts other policemen along the regularised route of the chase, several of whom, in the last shot, after the apache has poled a rowboat across a stream in the background, ‘magically’ step out of the left foreground and right foreground to finally apprehend him.

Another pair of films exemplifies a different referential shift, from working class to criminal: *Au pays noir* (1905),⁴⁸ which was probably inspired by a British-Gaumont documentary, *L’Explosion de grisou* (1904)⁴⁹, even more than by Emile Zola’s *Germinal* and *Au bagne*

⁴⁶ Stephen Bottomore has argued that a precedent for this matching action or movement across several shots can be found in early *actualité* films – Bottomore, ‘Shots in the Dark: The Real Origins of Film Editing,’ *Sight and Sound*, 57 (Summer 1987), 201–204.

⁴⁷ A similar cut-in middle shot, serving a narrative function, occurs at the beginning of Vitagraph’s *Foul Play*, but that film was not released until January 1907.

⁴⁸ Two National Film Archive 35mm prints, 785 feet and 600 feet, respectively. English title: *In the Mining District*. Sadoul attributes the film to Lucien Nonguet.

⁴⁹ Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma*, II, 312.

(1905-1906),⁵⁰ a rather grim reworking of *Histoire d'un crime* (1901). As one of Pathé's more popular films during the summer of 1905 (and yet one of the last to depict male working-class conditions for several years), *Au pays noir* still remained closely tied to the cinema of attractions, particularly as it defined the historical reconstruction film. Eight brief intertitles introduce an equal number of autonomous shot-scenes, all of which rely on decors constructed at Pathé's new Montreuil studio. Some of these tableaux are quite detailed in rendering the space and action of a working-class milieu – for example, the entrance gate to the mine includes a distant painted flat of the town, railway tracks on the ground, and a catwalk above, within which a complicated choreography unfolds involving mine workers, the owner and his managers, a horse-drawn rail cart, and a woman and boy scavenging for loose pieces of coal.

The principal attraction of the film – and a Pathé trademark of the period⁵¹ – however, is the 180° pan across a painted panorama, which follows a group of miners (including a father and son) from their houses through the town square to the mine entrance, and the 90° pan across the deep-space working tunnels leading off from a central shaft underground, at the end of which father and son come forward to sit and eat lunch with their fellows. Unlike *Indians and Cowboys*, in both of these shots, the function of the pan is more descriptive than narrative, offering a kind of simulated documentary tour of a coal mine site. Only in the sixth tableau does the narrative seem to come to the fore, in an accidental 'pit gas' explosion; but even this provides the occasion for *truc* scratches on the filmstrip, to simulate the explosion, and the spectacle of water pouring out of the rock ceiling and walls of the studio tunnel. Moreover, in the two copies of *Au pays noir* that survive, the following rescue scene seems to have given different exhibitors the license to insert *actualité* footage of real rescue teams preparing to descend into the mine.⁵² Both copies, however, conclude in a long shot of the miners' bodies laid out around the coal pit entrance, against the painted flat of a high slag slope; and, when the surviving father emerges, he pushes away the owner and doctor in order to stand over his dead son as the rest of his family clusters around him.⁵³ Although the film clearly valorizes patriarchal family bonds, this 'tragic' tableau – the very antithesis of the *féerie* or historical film's 'Apotheosis' ending – also strongly suggest that working-class men (and women) are to endure suffering as 'natural' and simply in 'the order of things.'⁵⁴

Six months later, following the success of *Les Apaches de Paris* (1905) [which has not survived],⁵⁵ *Au bagne* initially seemed to emulate the mode of representation marking *Au pays noir* quite closely. In the first half of the film, brief intertitles introduce autonomous shot-scenes which 'document', in studio decors, the life of a convict from the moment he enters prison, focusing on his shackling and branding, hard labour, and punishment by whipping. One of these tableaux even includes the spectacle attraction of a 90° pan across the painted panorama of a harbour dock, which follows some prisoners who have been

⁵⁰ Museum of Modern Art 16mm print, English title: *Life of a Convict or Scenes of Convict Life*.

⁵¹ Barry Salt was one of the first to mention this feature of 1905-1906 Pathé films – Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 78.

⁵² The two surviving prints at the National Film Archive include very different *actualité* footage. One of the prints has French intertitles, but includes the trademarks of two different Belgian *fête foraine* distributors or exhibitors; the other has German intertitles, one of which includes the trademark of Raleigh & Robert.

⁵³ One of the surviving prints has an *actualité* shot of a funeral cortege appended to this concluding tableau. The other contains an initial, unintegrated middle shot of a coal miner on his back picking at a coal seam just above him – perhaps an example of what Salt has called the 'emblematic shot', which was sometimes used to open or close a film during this period – Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 55-56.

⁵⁴ Although the film could have been used for strike purposes, most strikes were centred in Paris rather than in the northeast region of the coal and steel industries during this period – Nye,

⁵⁵ For a comparative analysis of these two films, see André Gaudreault, 'Récit singulier, récit itératif: *Au bagne* (Pathé, 1905), in Pierre Guibbert, ed., *Les Premiers Ans du cinéma français*, Perpignan, Institut Jean Vigo, 1985, 233-241. See, also Haggart's *The Life of Charles Pearce* (1906), made some months later.

⁵⁶ Earlier British films had employed similar reverse-angle cuts, but usually for comic purposes – see, for example, Bamforth's *Ladies' Skirts Nailed to a Fence* (1900), Collins' *The Runaway Match* (1903), and *The Other Side of the Hedge* (1905) – Brewster, 'A Scene at the Movies,' 7-9; and Salt, *Film Style and Technology*, 65.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France*, 189-190, 214-226, 265-309.

⁵⁸ Museum of Modern Art 16mm print, no intertitles. English title: *A Father's Honour*.

⁵⁹ Archives du Film (Bois d'Arcy) 35mm print, 95 meters, no intertitles. English title: *Victims of the Storm*.

conscripted into loading a ship. The subsequent escape of a specific convict from prison, however, is represented quite differently. First of all, in the long shot of the convict's cell, the light level changes as a guard, on his inspection rounds, enters and exits with a lantern – probably to mark the tableau as a night scene (originally tinted blue) which is momentarily lit (tinted amber) by the lantern. More important, as the convict goes to his cell window left background and jumps out (he has used a file to break both the bars and his shackles), there is a 180° shift to a low angle long shot of the prison exterior just as he emerges from the window right centre background. Not only does this reverse-angle shift match-cut his movement from one space to another adjacent space,⁵⁶ but the second shot continues to follow his movement by tilting down as he drops to the ground and simultaneously reveals another guard centre foreground whom he must subdue before running off right foreground. Then a reverse tilt of the camera reveals yet another guard coming out of the same window to yell off right foreground and order a cannon to be fired as an alarm. In sharp contrast to the descriptive function of the earlier pan, this camera movement, much like that in *Indians and Cowboys*, serves to link three consecutive stages in a narrative line of action. The convict's escape carries over through two further shots (now filmed on location), only one of which matches his frame exits and entrances; and, finally, an intertitle announces his arrest, which is handled by having the boat he has stolen be captured by the police in two pursuing launches. The narrative excitement generated in this four-shot sequence is even further contained, not only by the studio tableau of his execution by a firing squad (staged for the other prisoners as well as the spectator), but also in a final shot (again on location) of his weighted body being dumped unceremoniously from a breakwater into the sea. This moralising excess of representation clearly suggests that reinscribing penal torture and execution as public spectacle would serve as an effective means of 'social defense' against criminal deviance; and *Au bagne* may well have helped to provoke the 1906-1908 debate over reinstating capital punishment in France.⁵⁷

That the remotivation of frame changes did not always follow a chronological progression also is evident in another pair of Pathé films. *L'Honneur d'un père* (1905)⁵⁸ and *L'Effet de l'orage* (1905-1906),⁵⁹ both of which involve petit-bourgeois or bourgeois families with property. *L'Effet de l'orage*, for instance, generally follows the cinema of attractions by representing and resolving the antagonism between neighbouring fathers in just three emblematic shot-scenes, all of which are recorded in studio-decors. The first shot presents two side-by-side country houses, with a high wall between them, dividing the frame into two equal halves. One father is working on a ladder against the wall, when the other comes out to quarrel with him. Each is taken into his house – the one by a son, the other by a daughter – and the young man climbs the ladder presumably to declare his love for the young woman, a moment which is disrupted when each father returns, pushes his child



L'Honneur d'un père (1905)

back into the house, and resumes the quarrel. The second shot 'releases' the young couple into a blue-tinted natural landscape, and a descriptive pan right follows them as they stroll arm-in-arm across a wooded glen, against a painted panorama of distant hills and moon-filled sky. Once they exit right, however, the *truc* of several inserted orange-red frames signals the first of a series of changes: the painted flat of a now-cloudy sky moves left in the background, scratches on the filmstrip simulate rain falling, and orange zigzags of lightning flash across the frame. Several people cross the glen from right to left, and the couple returns to shelter by a tree right; suddenly, lightning seems to strike the tree (which bursts into flames), and a large limb breaks off and falls on the young man, who collapses and has to be carried off (in a reverse pan left). The last shot depicts the amber-tinted interior of one house, where, under the care his father and the young woman, the young man revives. According to narrative expectation, the other father rushes in, and the older men angrily square off from left foreground and right foreground positions, across the centred couple. The young woman speaks to her father and, as the couple moves into the background, the two fathers come to the centre foreground and finally shake hands. Young love and a natural disaster combine in typical melodramatic fashion to reconcile the differences between the two privileged representatives – mothers being conspicuously absent – of a strongly patriarchal social order.

Produced over a half-year earlier, *L'Honneur d'un père* (1905) also focuses ultimately on a propertied father (again, the mother is absent), but in far less happy circumstances. And it differs from the previously considered films, with the exception of *Indians and Cowboys* and

Brigandage moderne, in that all of its eight shots are filmed on location. The first two shots establish the narrative premise: a young woman receives a letter and leaves her father's country house apparently to meet a man by an old stone bridge, a man who inexplicably strangles her in anger (because there is no insert close up of the letter, the motive remains unclear). The next four shots, which constitute at least half of the film, trace the discovery and return of the daughter's body: and here, in contrast to *L'Effet de l'orage* is where specific frame changes serve to advance the narrative. The first comes in the long shot of a boy apparently checking his traps along a stream, where a pan right, which at first seems merely descriptive, leads to a narrative question: what has he discovered at the water's edge? Two shots later, when the boy returns with several men, a closer long shot reveals that it is a woman's body, which they place on a stretcher; and a pan left describes their journey, which will be completed in the next shot, where the father recognises his daughter and also reads the initial letter. Here the pan right and then the closer long shot are essential in constructing a chain of simultaneously revealed and withheld information – an advance over the repeated pattern of simple revelation in *Indians and Cowboys* – which is crucial to the causal continuity of this patriarchal narrative. For, in the final two shots, the killer is recognised and pursued by the police, only to be shot and killed, as he runs up a wooded path from the centre background, by the father who has concealed himself by a tree left foreground. And the father's successful vengeance, to restore his 'honour', is clearly sanctioned by the male authorities, who come up to check the body and shake his hand.

These last two films in particular suggest that a slightly different category of spectacle-narrative was beginning to define Pathé's dramatic and realist films – that of the domestic melodrama. Many of these films told stories of contemporary family traumas, of the threatened loss to the family of a father or child – and less often, at least initially, the mother – usually through twists of fate or coincidence involving either an accident or else an apache crime. And the traumatic loss of a child was especially relevant in France, given the country's uniquely low birthrate at the turn of the century.⁶⁰ As in both *L'Honneur d'un père* and *L'Effet de l'orage*, the accident or criminal act which threatened the family usually occurred in a 'public space', but the resolution, especially if it restored family harmony, tended to return to the sanctified 'private space' of the home.⁶¹ The families in these domestic melodramas ranged from working-class and petit-bourgeois to bourgeois, which seems still to have assumed a mass audience 'in which different classes and social groups [could] meet and find an identity'.⁶² However, they were almost always explicitly patriarchal, privileging the father's position in the hierarchy of family relations. And that position was, as in *L'Honneur d'un père*, often sanctioned in the end by the police – in an appropriately ideological gesture which reaffirmed its significance to the French social order.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, Mayeur and Rebérioux, *The Third Republic from its Origins to the Great War, 1871-1914*, 42-43.

⁶¹ My use of the opposition between public and private space is indebted to Mayne, 'The Two Spheres of Early Cinema,' 69-88.

⁶² Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field,' 36.

As Peter Brooks has suggested, the cinema was the 20th-century popular art form which most relayed and supplanted 19th-century melodrama; and Pathé's early domestic melodramas certainly constitute a specific instance of such a transposition in that they rework many of the conventions of French stage melodrama. From its inception, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Brooks argues, 'melodrama [took] as its concern and *raison d'être* the location, expression, and imposition of basic ethical and psychic truths,' becoming the principal cultural form through which the essentially moral universe of a 'desacralised' French society was demonstrated and made operative.⁶³ Accordingly, its characters assumed 'primary psychic roles, father, mother, child'⁶⁴; and what Rick Altman has called its 'dual-focus narrative'⁶⁵ presented first the blockage or eclipse of virtue and then its eventual confirmation and restoration – and that blockage, Maureen Turim reminds us, took on the specific form of crimes of violence in the 'Boulevard du Temple' plays.⁶⁶ All of these features together, of course, presumed that the family and its domestic sphere of personal relationships was the principal institution legitimising a bourgeois social order. If Pathé's domestic melodramas drew on this long tradition of French melodrama for both their narrative economy and symbolic configuration – even to the point of giving their characters generic names – they also shared in that tradition's mode of representation. For melodrama strove, in Brooks' words, 'to make the "real" and the "ordinary" and "private life" interesting through heightened utterance and gesture' as well as to 'make its representations clear and legible for everyone.'⁶⁷ This combination of rhetorical intensification and representational clarity in 19th-century melodrama, I would argue, specifically informed Pathé's domestic melodrama, especially through discursive features such as changes in framing.⁶⁸ Camera movement, cut-ins, reverse-angle cutting, as well as other forms of alternation all began to turn into the symptoms, to appropriate Brooks' terms, of that melodramatic pressure being exerted 'upon the surface of things' in order to extract a so-called moral truth.⁶⁹

Just how crucial these patterns of alternation and changes in framing were to the development of a narrative cinema paradigm is evident in a wide range of domestic melodramas released by Pathé in 1906. Some of them continued to focus on the criminally deviant and their perceived threat to the patriarchal family. *Le Braconnier* (1906), for instance, tells a story that would still be familiar to those who had joined the recent migration from country to city in France: a poacher is threatening a country estate and the old gamekeeper (and his daughter) who manages it along with a young assistant.⁷⁰ After learning that a man is setting traps illegally on the estate, the old gamekeeper goes to check and is shot by the poacher; the young man then proves himself by apprehending the poacher and reaching a doctor in time for the wounded man to be treated successfully. One of the interesting features of this film is its use of 'bridge' shots, perhaps modelled on the point-of-view shot sequence,

⁶³ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, 15.

⁶⁴ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 4, 32. See, also, Catherine Bodard Silver, 'Salon, Foyer, Bureau: Women and the Professions in France,' in *Clio's Consciousness Raised*, ed. Mary Hartman and Lois W Banner, New York, Harper & Row, 1974, 78-82; Theodore Zeldin, *France, 1848-1945: Ambition and Love*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, 11-22; and, especially, James F Macmillan, *Housewife or Harlot: the Place of Women in French Society, 1870-1940*, New York, St Martin's, 1981, 11-12.

⁶⁵ Altman, 'Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today,' 331-337.

⁶⁶ Maureen Turim, 'French Melodrama: Theory of a Specific History,' *Theater Journal*, 39.3 (October 1987), 309. Although Turim's principal concern is with French films of the 1920s, her essay makes a good argument for the historical specificity of French film melodrama. See also, the special melodrama issue of *Les Cahiers de la cinémathèque*, 28 (1979).

⁶⁷ Brooks, *The Melodramatic*

Imagination, 14, 15.
See, also, Meisel,
Realizations, 38-51.

⁶⁸ A Nicholas Vardac was one of the first to draw some parallels between stage and film melodrama, in *Stage to Screen – Theatrical Origins of Early Film: David Garrick to D.W. Griffith*, Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1949, 20-66. See, also Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field,' 22-23.

⁶⁹ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 2. Both Gunning and Turim express a similar idea in different contexts – see Gunning, 'What I Saw from the Rear Window,' 41; and Turim, 'French Melodrama,' 312.

⁷⁰ National Film Archive 35mm print, 375 feet, two French intertitles. English title: *The Poacher*.

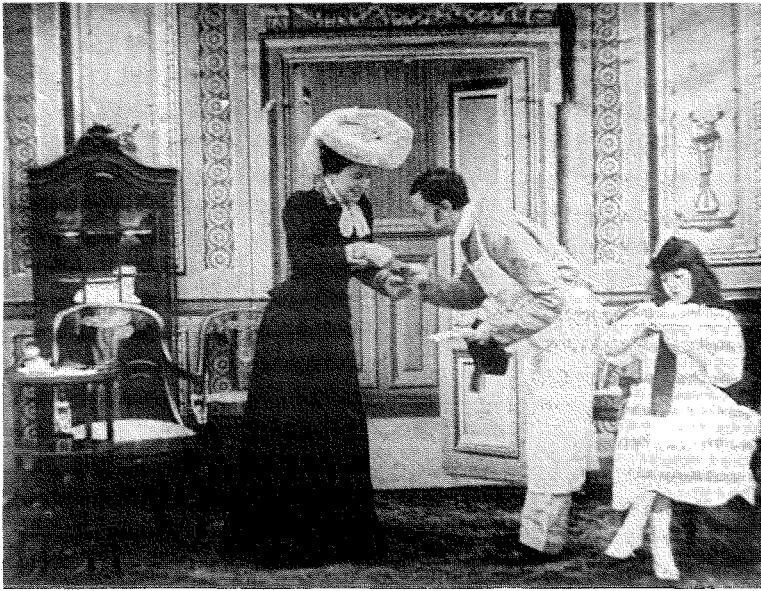
⁷¹ National Film Archive 35mm print, 460 feet, no intertitles. English title: *Child Kidnapped* or *The Detective*.

⁷² A close up insert of a letter resolving the narrative also appeared at the end of *Un Tour du monde d'un policier*, but that film was released a month or so later the same summer.

⁷³ An alternating sequence of exterior and interior shots does not appear in Vitagraph's films until *The Mill Girl*, which was released in September 1907.

which connect a character in one space to another, subsequent space, not through sight, but through sound. The film's second shot, for example, presents the young man (after he has left the gamekeeper's house) coming up a ravine path and stopping to listen; in the next shot he discovers a trap set by the poacher (who has exited the frame just before he enters). Such a shot is not repeated when the gamekeeper leaves the house to find the poacher; but one does occur immediately after the shooting, in order to place several men nearby so that, when the young man finds the gamekeeper and calls out, they can appear and help carry the wounded man off. Thereafter, *Le Braconnier* organises its tightly condensed series of separate deep-space long shots according to the young man's heroic actions: in one, he surprises the poacher, quickly subdues him, and loads the now-bound man onto a passing cart; in another, the cart stops by a gate and the young man runs into the courtyard centre background to accost a doctor. Two lines of action are neatly combined in the last shots – the poacher is taken to the local police station, the doctor follows along in his carriage to treat the gamekeeper – and, in the final tableau, the young man can recount his 'adventure' to the gamekeeper – and receive his daughter's hand in marriage – in the newly secured private space of the home.

Le Détective (1906) tells of a similar threat, but to a bourgeois family – a young girl is seized by apaches in order to extract a ransom from her father and mother – and the girl's action, interestingly enough, proves as crucial as the hired detective's to the film's happy ending.⁷¹ The kidnapping is narrated in three loosely linked shots – of the family drawing room, a country lane where the girl and a family maid are walking, and the kidnappers' cabin in a wood – in the fourth, the ransom note is delivered to the house – and displayed in one of the earliest close-up inserts of a letter in the cinema.⁷² The note kicks off the search for the girl by a detective, whose disguise unfortunately fails to keep him from being captured by the kidnappers as well. Most of the rest of the film is devoted to two setpieces of action, each of which is organised according to the principle of alternation, but this time, as in *Au bain*, the alternation is between adjacent exterior and interior views of, first, the kidnappers' cabin and, then, a barn with a loft.⁷³ In the first sequence where the girl escapes from the apaches and then returns to rescue the detective (who has been tied to a barrel marked 'explosives') – the camera consistently shifts 180° from inside to outside and back. Moreover, the recurring exterior view of the cabin is marked by a high angle long shot, which serves to 'hide' the girl's tiny figure within the space of the frame (from both the apaches and the spectator). In the second sequence at the barn – where the girl and detective now elude the pursuing apaches – the shift in camera position is less precise, but it pivots on the detective's ruse of a rope leading of out a window centre background in the loft interior (while the two escapees hide in the left foreground. This leads the apaches off in one direction in the final shot, while the girl and detective can escape in the other. Although, in its



La Loi du pardon (1906)

alternation of exterior and interior views, *Le Détective* represents a relatively sophisticated instance of a continuous flow of action across a unified spatial-temporal continuum, at least for 1906, it also concludes with a spectacle attraction – an isolated middle shot of the girl at home, framed by her two smiling parents. Much like the emblematic shots concluding Pathé's slightly later comic films, in that it condenses the narrative into a synecdochical figure, this 'family portrait' concisely summarises the ideological project which these French domestic melodramas seemed determined to serve.

In contrast to Pathé's previous domestic melodramas, *La Loi du pardon* (1906)⁷⁴, which Jasset singled out as one of the first popular successes in the genre,⁷⁵ focuses on moral deviance as a threat to the family from within. This threat comes from the wife or mother, who is guilty of infidelity; and its resolution turns on the daughter's desire (and health) as well as her husband's judgement. The film's opening shot succinctly narrates the family's disintegration: in a rather modern drawing room,⁷⁶ the husband discovers the wife writing a note in response to a love letter she has just received (there is no close up insert of explanation) and, despite the pleas of both mother and daughter, angrily orders her to leave. And it closes in a tableau which summarises the emotional situation: the husband in despair left foreground, the daughter weeping right foreground, and an empty space centre background where the wife has exited. The next shot recapitulates this private moment of the couple's separation in a public courtroom, where several judges reaffirm the father's right to the daughter, but not before the girl expresses her own desire to be with her mother. The third shot then recapitulates the

⁷⁴ National Film archive 35mm print, 460 feet, one Italian intertitle. English title: *The Law of Pardon*. The film has been attributed to both André Heuzé and Albert Capellani.

⁷⁵ Jasset, 'Etude sur la mise-en-scène en cinématographie,' 87.

⁷⁶ The principal feature defining it as modern is the light-coloured wallpaper, which had been introduced by the late 19th century bourgeois spas and resorts – Weber, *France, Fin-de-siècle* 187.

initial emotional situation, in a slight change of framing: father and daughter are sitting alone on a park bench, but in a relatively empty long shot which contrasts with the rather full, condensed spaces of the previous full shot/long shots. The last five shots of the film are organised around an alternation (with mismatched exits and entrances) between full shot/long shot of the bedroom interior where the girl now lies ill and a long shot of the exterior street entrance to the family townhouse. The husband leaves the girl sleeping in the company of a nun (he is going to buy her some gifts it turns out); and, as he exits in the exterior long shot, the mother gets out of a carriage standing right background and comes to the townhouse door and enters. What happens now constitutes an intriguing ideological twist on the function of disguise – for the mother persuades the nun to exchange clothes behind a door. Her objective presumably is to sit with her daughter undetected; yet when the girl awakens, they immediately embrace. More important, the nun's habit has the effect of masking or even erasing the mother's guilt. And this disguise proves significant when the husband returns to recognise and again reject her (although she kneels to plead with him), that is, until the daughter gets out of bed to join his reluctant hand with her mother's in a very uneasy centre foreground reconciliation. In the private space of the child's room, the earlier public verdict is overturned as the bond between mother and daughter forces the father to accept the mother's centrality to the bourgeois family.

Pauvre Mère (1906),⁷⁷ which was released just two months later, also focuses on the bond between mother and daughter, but in a different class milieu. In just eleven shots, it narrates the story of a working-class mother (the father now is conspicuously absent) who loses her daughter in an accident, takes to drink, falls ill, and soon dies in a convent hospital. Here, a point-of-view shot sequence is crucial in representing the accident which opens the film.⁷⁸ The first shot describes the simple room in which the mother and daughter live: the woman does 'put-out' work at a sewing machine while the girl plays with a doll and runs to the room's single window (frame left). The cut to a high angle long shot of a military band marching through the street then reveals what the girl is seeing; and the camera position, along with the direction of the girl's look, quickly establish that the room is located several storeys above the street. The next shot returns to the room as the woman anxiously pulls the girl away from the window and resumes her sewing; but the girl goes back to the window, leans too far out, and, to the mother's horror, tumbles out. In contrast to Pathé's previous films, then, *Pauvre Mère* uses the spectacle of a point-of-view shot sequence (observed by a female rather than a male) as the pretext or narrative premise for an unrelenting series of moments of frustrated desire. To that end, in its final six shots, the film repeatedly deploys another spectacle feature unique to the cinema – the dissolve or superimposition – in a redundant pattern which contrasts markedly with that of the point-of-view shot sequence. The mother's obsessive desire for her lost daughter is represented

⁷⁷ National Film Archive 35 mm print, 350 feet, no intertitles: English title: *Poor Mother*.

⁷⁸ A point-of-view shot (but of a note offering a tip on a horse race) is used similarly, at one point, to motivate the narrative action in Vitagraph's *The 100-to-1 Shot* (August 1906) – see Thompson, 'The Formulation of the Classical Hollywood Style,' 199.

through three separate superimpositions of the child, the most interesting of which appears, in conjunction with a cut-in, as the mother is sitting dejectedly on a park bench – in a full shot, the girl dissolves in to replace another girl whom the mother has noticed playing nearby and taken on to her lap. Then, in the last shot, the girl materialises over her mother, who lies in a hospital bed; and they reach out toward one another just before the mother falls back and dies, as if to signal a promised reunion. Rather than exploit the sense of magical illusion often previously associated with superimpositions, *Pauvre Mère* uses them instead as a rhetorical figure to heighten the subjective, emotional intensity of the mother's condition.

While exemplifying the domestic melodrama's significance to the development of a French narrative cinema paradigm, these last two Pathé films also raise questions about the composition of French cinema audiences and how exhibition practices affected their reception of particular films. In privileging the relationship between mother and daughter and the emotional appeal of their shared desire, for instance, both *La Loi du pardon* and *Pauvre Mère* seem to address a specifically female spectator.⁷⁹ This suggests that, by 1906, women – and perhaps children – were beginning to constitute an increasingly important segment of those who regularly attended cinema programmes in France.⁸⁰ Attracting and holding their interest with such women-centred melodramas may well have been one of Pathé's earliest strategies for 'legitimising' the French cinema industry. Moreover, it suggests that women spectators were drawn from more than just one class, and thus their presence tended to sustain the maximally inclusive, crossclass make-up of the French mass cinema audience. Finally, as textual systems, both films address the spectator somewhat ambiguously at the end. Is the concluding tableau in *Pauvre Mère*, for instance, to be read, within a conservative Catholic tradition, as a legitimate religious 'reward' for the mother's suffering or, perhaps less likely, as an implicit appeal for social measures to redress the near-poverty conditions of the single working-class woman? In *La Loi du pardon*, is the wife/mother to be read as a kind of sanctified Mary Magdalene, a figure of innocence represented from the daughter's point of view, or a woman who has literally taken a vow of chastity? And what about the husband/father's attitude, for only he, not the judge, can fulfil the real 'law of pardon' – has the family actually been restored? The answer might have depended on where and in what context one saw the film. How would either have been read, for instance, if screened, as some films were beginning to be, in a Catholic Church?⁸¹ Despite all of Pathé's advances in story-telling efficiency and clarity by 1906, the cinema exhibitor could still play a significant role in determining the spectator's experience and reading of a film – through adding or cutting intertitles, prefatory commentary, accompanying music, and even positioning on his programme.

Despite such specially marketed films as *La Loi du pardon* and *Pauvre Mère*, however, most of Pathé's domestic melodramas continued to

⁷⁹ On this point I am indebted to E Ann Kaplan, 'Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman's Film, 1910-1940,' *Home is Where the Heart Is*, 116-120.

⁸⁰ Several writers comment on the mixed composition of the French cinema audience, including women and children – see, for instance, Maxime Leproust, 'Le Théâtre Cinéma,' *Phono-Ciné-Gazette*, 43 (1 January 1907), 13-14; and François Vaillery, 'Les Cinémas de Paris,' *Phono-Ciné-Gazette*, 53 (1 June 1907), 210.

⁸¹ For further information on the French Catholic Church's early pedagogical use of the cinema, see the La Bonne Presse ad in *Le Fascinateur*, 36 (1 December 1905), 381; 'La Projection religieuse,' *Phono-Ciné-Gazette*, 65 (1 December 1907), 419; and C Michel Coissac, *Histoire du cinématographe* (Paris: Cinéopse, 1925, 385-387).

centre on men and explicitly patriarchal family relations. This was even true of Albert Capellani's *Un Drame à Venise* (1906-1907), a melodrama of infidelity and violence set in the 'exotic' milieu of Renaissance Venice, which made extensive use of Pathé's new system of representation and narration. Here, an old beggar discovers a noble woman's clandestine affair and exposes the couple to the husband, who then kills his wife's lover in their own bedroom. This film makes much of its painted flat decors, combined with the company's studio pool, representing the public spaces of Venice where the lovers rendezvous, are spied on and pursued. But the interior spaces prove even more interesting, and right from the beginning. For the film opens with a waist-level American shot of the woman at a tiny reading table in a small tapestried room. As she stands and exits through a door right, there is a 90° shift to an eye-level long shot of the bedroom, match-cutting her entrance from a left centre background door as she goes past the canopied bed centre background, to a window right and blows a kiss. After an ellipsis, presumably for a missing intertitle, another American shot shows her writing a letter at her table – the overall effect of which is to define that small room as her own separate space and the locus of her illicit desire. The letter is addressed to her lover, who stupidly discards it in a public square – and the old beggar whom he has rudely rejected earlier quickly retrieves the pieces. As the beggar later sits at a small table in his garret room (a space just as marginal, ironically, as the woman's), there is a cut-in high angle middle shot of him piecing the letter back together and discovering its meaning for his own desire – revenge. The husband, followed by the beggar, then pursues the lover to his own house and, from the bridge right centre background, sees his wife let down a rope ladder from the window so that he can climb up from a gondola left centre foreground and into the bedroom. The expected climax comes as the husband breaks in on the couple (from a door left); the two men draw knives; and the husband finally stabs the lover repeatedly at the window right and pushes him out. The final shot of the house exterior then matchcuts the lover's body falling from the window into the canal, while the beggar now watches from the bridge; and the shot holds until the canal surface becomes smooth and calm once again. And what happens to the woman? During the struggle, she exits through the bedroom door into her reading room, and is similarly erased in the film's final representation of private as well as public surfaces.

Within the more familiar contemporary milieux of the domestic melodrama, some films actually continued to rely on the cinema of attractions paradigm while others adopted the new system. And nearly all of them, in line with previous films, had children now play crucial roles in both resolving narrative conflict and containing transgression. Pathé's *Distress* (1907)⁸², for instance, focuses on the relationship between an unemployed working-class father and his young daughter, beginning with his theft of a baguette and his quick arrest and conviction. In a telling detail at the police station, the father and daughter are roughly

⁸² Library of Congress
35mm print, 370 feet,
five French intertitles.

separated while a woman happily exits with her recovered baguette. A brief sequence then crosscuts two different spaces; the girl is introduced to a convent orphanage school classroom, and the father escapes from his prison cell and returns to steal the girl willingly away from the convent school playground.⁸³ Reunited with his daughter, the man now becomes a 'good father' (a 'repentant' rather than an 'incorrigible' ex-convict, as earlier represented in *Au bagne*)⁸⁴ and, in two autonomous shots, gets a construction job and brings some food home to the girl in a simple garret room. This restored family is threatened, however, in a sequence of interrelated shots as a gendarme comes to the construction site in search of the escaped convict. He surprises the father working on the roof, which causes him to slip; and a match-cut describes his fatal fall to the ground below, where the gendarme tries to comfort the girl after her father is carried off on a stretcher. *Distress* then concludes in two more autonomous shot-scenes, whose order serves to emphasise the girl's loss of her father. First, the gendarme takes the girl home to his wife and two children, where she is immediately welcomed in a bourgeois-style dining room; and they all sit down to supper in a tableau which echoes the scene of the more spartan meal she and her father shared earlier. The last, much more static tableau, however, is of a cemetery, with snow falling, as the girl, in the company of the gendarme, places flowers and prays at her father's simple grave marker. By the end, this film has criticised an unfeeling public system of justice, while praising the private action of a bourgeois family in taking in an orphan, and honoured a 'good' working-class father, while also eliminating him in order to move his daughter into a higher social class.

A final pair of films neatly summarises the social relations of class, gender, and generation in Pathé's domestic melodramas and demonstrates in their elaboration of a two-part narrative structure, just how accomplished such films had become by the summer of 1907. The first, *The Good Grandfather* (1907),⁸⁵ poses the question of whether a young man's bourgeois parents can accept his marriage to a woman who does seamstress work for the family. The first five shots of the film (all but one waist-level long shots) focus on the young woman: in the family dining room (where she resists the son's advances one evening), for instance, and, in 'bridge' shots, as she journeys the next morning from her tiny one-room apartment to the townhouse.⁸⁶ The exception is a waist-level full shot of her dressing and sipping coffee in her own room that morning, which succinctly contrasts the cramped limitations of her world with the spaciousness of the bourgeois family milieu. The next sequence focuses on the young man, who happens to be a painter, as he continues to court the young woman (an intertitle describes him as her 'first love'), ending eventually in her room where she extracts a promise from him. 'Seven months later', in the room in which he is painting, she tells him she is pregnant; and, after his mother angrily orders her out of the house, the son follows.

Two subsequent autonomous shot-scenes, introduced by intertitles,

⁸³ Earlier instances of brief crosscutting sequences can be found in Pathé's *Les Chiens contrebandiers* (June 1906), Vitagraph's *The 100-to-1 Shot* (August 1906) and Gaumont's *Le Matelas alcoolique* (November 1906).

⁸⁴ This distinction between ex-convicts circulated widely in France during the time – see, Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France*, 174.

⁸⁵ National Film Archive 35 mm print, 728 feet, ten German intertitles – including two letters.

⁸⁶ The dark wallpaper in the family's rooms marks the old couple as rather traditionally bourgeois.

⁸⁷ National Film
Archive 35mm print,
720 feet, five French
intertitles – including
one letter. English
title: *The Two Sisters*.

close off the first half of the film and open up the second, concisely narrating a change in the young couple's situation. First, they are forced to send the baby off to a wet nurse in the country (the woman is ill; the man spends all of his time painting); three years later, having prospered, they go to the rough dwelling of a peasant couple, who sadly return their daughter to them. By chance, one day, the son's father meets the young woman and her daughter in a city park; and his kind greeting sets up a resolution to the family rift by shifting it comically on to the grandparents. In a waist-level full shot, the old couple argue over a dice board game they are playing (still costumed in bed clothes); and then each surreptitiously, in a separate middle shot, writes a letter to Amalie, the granddaughter – and each letter, in a close up insert, asks her to keep it a secret from the other. A further full shot shows them continuing the argument, while getting dressed in good bourgeois black, and exiting separately. As its title suggests, the film then follows the grandfather (not the grandmother), again through 'bridge' shots, as he goes to a toyshop and comes out laden with two dolls, a drum, a little chair, and a hobby horse. Multiple reconciliations are now played out in the young couple's new drawing room: the grandfather arrives first to play with Amalie and is then hidden by her mother; the grandmother arrives to play with the child and embrace the woman she once rejected; then Amalie (somewhat like the girl in *Le Loi du pardon*) brings the grandparents together to sit on a central couch; and finally, their son arrives to express his surprise and pleasure. In a sense, the daughter 'legitimizes' the older generation, and hence herself as well; once the embodiment of *mésalliance*, she now marks its erasure. And to conclude its continually shifting focalisation of character, *The Good Grandfather* ends, much like *Le Détective* on an emblematic middle shot family portrait, with the young girl at the centre.

Les Deux orphelines (1907), another early Capellani film, tells a very different story of *mésalliance* between social classes.⁸⁷ This film focuses on two sisters and their sick mother who all live together in a garret room (described in the opening waist-level long shot), where the young women (whose light-coloured costumes contrast with the mother's black dress) also do 'put-out' work as seamstresses. Delivering a bundle of clothes to a shop one day, the elder sister, Lucy, meets a man who drives her home in his touring car, in a sequence of matched exits and entrances across three long shots. Back in the garret room, Lucy argues with her mother and angrily leaves to join the man who is still waiting for her outside. In matched exterior and interior long shots, he takes her to his modern white stucco house and into a large drawing room. There she writes a letter which, in a close-up insert, expresses her frustration over the 'privations' and 'disappointments' of her life and asks her mother to 'forget and forgive' her. An intertitle 'A fatal letter', introduces a closer full shot of the garret room, which serves to heighten the now bedridden mother's reaction to the letter – she collapses in shock – and the younger sister's grief at her death.

This tableau effectively closes the first 'act' of *Les Deux orphelines*, and another intertitle 'A year later', marks the beginning of the second half. The younger sister is now selling flowers on the street, and she meets Lucy, dressed in the latest fashion, coming out of a jewellery shop. Lucy invites her sister into a waiting carriage, takes her 'home', and, in an exterior long shot, introduces her to the man whose mistress she now obviously has become – his reaction is to rub his hands together in anticipation and follow them into the house. What follows, intriguingly, is a waist-level full shot of the younger sister at a dressing table being transformed by new clothes, make-up, and hair style. After the two sisters exit, the shot holds briefly on a suggestive detail: the maid now sits at the dressing table to dab some powder on her face. While Lucy seems to be responsible for this change, it also serves to fulfil the man's desire, as revealed in the following long shot, where the two women now join him in the drawing room. After Lucy is called away by a maid, he quickly propositions the frightened sister and is only stopped from attacking her by Lucy's return. She believes her sister's explanation rather than his and, in a moment which is recapitulated outside the house, leaves him to go off with her sister. In a final tableau, preceded by an intertitle translated as 'The return to duty', the two sisters resume their work as seamstresses in the same garret room. Now that any explicit male presence has been erased, however, the newly reaffirmed bond between sisters is determined by their shared relationship to the dead mother. Both are dressed in black – as if replicating the mother's figure – and her chair sits conspicuously empty in the room's background. In the end, a double absence or erasure seems to 'lock' them into the 'woman's part' of suffering victim. However, although social mobility through illicit means is roundly condemned in *Les Deux orphelines*, it is less certain whether the two sisters' final position should be read as a punishment for disobedience, as a working class 'fate' to be endured, or, perhaps less likely, as a sign of social injustice.

Between 1905 and 1907, I have argued, Pathé's domestic melodramas played a critical role in the emergence of a narrative cinema paradigm in France. Initially, several relatively distinct models of transformation – involving redundancy, alternation, and other changes in framing – worked to subordinate spectacle to narrative across a range of generic categories. These then coalesced – in conjunction with inserted intertitles and letters – into a loose system of representation and narration within Pathé's dramatic and realist films, and especially its domestic melodramas. And that such a system emerged most clearly at this nodal point was determined, in part, by the continuing cultural significance of 19th-century stage melodrama. Furthermore, within Pathé's dramatic and realist films, this new system of representation and narration was mapped onto a specific historical site of French social relations. Those relations also coalesced around crucial axes of difference according to class and gender, particularly in terms of criminal or moral deviance from bourgeois social norms. And the patriarchal family served as the

principal site which was threatened and ultimately legitimated by that deviance. Finally, in that a number of Pathé's domestic melodramas, beginning in the summer of 1906, seem to specifically address a female spectator, they point to a historical change in the composition of the French cinema audience, as well as a possible strategy of legitimation within the industry. And what is perhaps even more important, unlike those of Pathé's domestic melodramas which reach conclusions explicitly valorizing patriarchal family relations, these women-centred melodramas consistently seem to end in less firmly coded, ambiguously legible tableaux – which already raises the question (now central to studies of the woman's film) of whether such films could be appropriated for radical, socially transformative ends.

The lines of inquiry I have traced through these early Pathé films are not meant to be exhaustive for a history of the narrative cinema's emergence in France. But they do, I think, pinpoint more precisely how certain strategies of representation and narration intersected with particular social relations of difference in terms of class and gender. If such strategies ultimately proved less crucial than the slightly later developments of extended parallel editing and especially of analytical editing (eyeline matches, shot/reverse shots) for what would become the dominant paradigm of the classical Hollywood cinema, so, too, may the historically specific structures of difference (class conflict being much less overt and even more displaced in the US) to which they were tied. On the one hand, this should encourage us to further historicise film melodrama by following Maureen Turim and Christine Gledhill's lead in exploring the distinctive developments that the 'melodramatic mode' took in different national cinemas. On the other hand, it should force us to confront just how heterogeneous the narrative cinema actually was in its initial formulation. And in that heterogeneity, in conjunction with persistent features of the cinema of attractions, lay the bases for French as well as other alternatives to the dominant American cinema, both before and after the latter's consolidation during the period of the Great War.

I am particularly grateful to Barbara Hodgdon, Sarah Maza, Patricia O'Brien, and Ginette Vincendeau for their helpful suggestions in revising this essay.

THE MELODRAMATIC MODE AND THE COMMERCIAL HINDI CINEMA:

NOTES ON FILM HISTORY, NARRATIVE AND
PERFORMANCE IN THE 1950s
BY RAVI VASUDEVAN

INDIAN FILM'S DOMINANT position in South Asia and popularity in the Middle East, parts of Africa, South East Asia and East Europe has been a long-standing one¹. Its ascendancy in the home market emerged within a few years of the inauguration of the talkies² and has held resilient against the competition of the Hollywood cinema and other foreign films.³

Within this economy, Hindi feature-film production has played a major role, catering to the largest linguistic market in the country. From the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s, the three major studios, Prabhat (in Pune, western India), Bombay Talkies (Bombay city) and New Theatres (Calcutta), produced both regional language and Hindi films; from the 1940s the Madras studios also started producing for the Hindi market. As a result, the Hindi feature has been the main component in national production.⁴ This has changed recently, with large increases in southern language production⁵, but the Hindi film still continues to have the largest domestic market.

Production units in the Indian industry were thrown into some chaos in the immediate years after the Second World War, with the entry of a large number of financiers, bloated with war-time profits, into the market. Fierce competition led to the demise of the major studios. A large number of production companies, mostly short-lived, emerged, based on Bombay, which has remained the major Hindi film producing centre.⁶ Such characteristics have tended to persist in the post-independence period.

The structure of the industry and its products has been heavily influenced by the power exhibitors have exercised in conditions of limited cinema outlets.⁷ This domination has created a strong emphasis on products conforming to a proven formula of commercial success, mainly relating to star combinations and famous musical directors.

¹In 1956, M B Billimoria noted that Pakistan and Ceylon were considered part of the home market. Parts of Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, Malaya, Singapore, Trinidad (ie., wherever there were significant Indian communities), the Middle East and South East Asia were singled out as major foreign markets. He estimated that 15-17 per cent of film revenue came from these sources. 'Foreign Markets for Indian Films', *Indian Talkie, 1931-56* (Bombay, Film Federation of India, 1956), pp 55-54. The popularity of Hindi films in Eastern Europe started in the 1950s

²During the silent era, American films dominated the Indian market, but this situation changed in the 1930s with the coming of Indian talkies. For details of this earlier influence

see Kristin Thompson, *Exporting, Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-34*, London, British Film Institute, 1985, pp 144-5

³Imports were high at the time of Independence. In 1948 250 American films were imported (85.9 per cent of foreign film imports). *Handbook of the Indian Film Industry*, Bombay, Motion Picture Society of India, 1949, p 456. However, very few cinema halls exhibited them; in 1954 it was estimated that not more than 5 per cent of cinemas showed American films. *Filmfare*, (India), November 12, 1954, p 3. A great deal of this exhibition would take place in the film-producing metropolises, but turn-over was high. For an American film, a few weeks run would be considered good, while a popular Hindi film could run for several months, sometimes over a year

⁴In 1955, out of 285 films produced country-wide, 126 were in Hindi. V Doraiswamy ed. *Asian Film directory and Who's Who*, Bombay, 1956, p 326

⁵By the end of 1970s the Tamil (105) and Malayalam (123) industries were producing as many films as the Hindi (122). E Barnouw and S Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980 ed., pp 294-5

This has not meant a lack of generic differentiation of the product. The Hindi film has produced the following narrative types: the mythological, drawing mainly upon the great Hindu myths; the devotional, about the relationship between devotee and deity; the stunt films, oriented to the spectacle of action; the historical drama, with an emphasis on period costume and setting; the social problem film, dealing with issues of social reform; and, much more broadly, the social. Though overlapping with the social reform film, this genre is not always so precise about the social ills it addresses. Set in modern times, the genre generates societal images that delineate ethical precepts raising questions of dignity, equality, honesty. The social referent is generally the plebeian or the *declassé*. It has become the characteristic genre of the post-independence cinema.

Problems of analysis

This article analyses films from the social genre of the Bombay Hindi cinema both because of their dominance, and because the better-known directors of the post-independence period (Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, Mehboob Khan), were associated with this genre. The focus is on certain general textual features of the Hindi film, its modes of narration, subject construction and performative indices.

Characteristics present in European and American melodrama – non-psychological motivation, prevalence of contrived plotting (coincidence), a heavily musical component to dramatic construction and the employment of a manichean moral universe⁸ – are observable in the Hindi film as well. So I will be using, heuristically, a framework evolved in relation to that mode. However, following Rosie Thomas's important work on the Hindi cinema⁹, I will be emphasising, within this general framework, the specificity of textual operations.

The question of specificity is a complicated one. Thomas and other commentators have made the significant point that traditions of aesthetic theory in India differ markedly from Aristotelian poetics.¹⁰ Rather than linear dramatic construction, a shifting discursive field – incorporating philosophical and ethical expression, emotional excess, comedy, song and dance – was theorised. This evidently poses problems for methods of analysis used to deal with linear dramatic narrative.

Though such discursive shifts also characterise the Hindi film, an important background to film history is the articulation of other modes with 'traditional' form. This interaction emerged in the Indian urban theatre of the 19th and 20th century.¹¹ The main agency here was the Parsi theatre, which travelled widely in the country, used a simple language or communication, and was very eclectic in the sources it used for its drama, which included Western narrative.¹² Apart from this anticipation of the geographical reach of the Hindi cinema and its hybrid structure, the Parsi theatre also employed the omnibus 'musical tragi-

comedy' form, as it was referred to. Further, these companies had a repertory of stock characters, of whom the comic character is particularly interesting for analogies with the Hindi cinema, because of the narratively unintegrated way his performance functioned: 'He enjoys extraordinary liberty, for his sole object is to create unbounded merriment in the theatre.'¹³

Such a form cannot be regarded solely in terms of the way it conforms to traditional aesthetics. The Parsi community of India's west coast was involved in modern forms of business and enterprise, and was familiar with European culture from an early period. The theatrical companies were strongly influenced by English melodrama of the period, imported stage machinery from England and advertised performance in terms of the novel attractions of 'transformation scenes' and 'dissolving views'. So they were also participant in that expanding 'culture of the visible' that has been seen as the 19th century prelude to the cinema.¹⁴

I do not want to labour the connections between these theatrical forms and the Hindi cinema; as I will suggest later, other, more 'traditional' theatrical influences are observable. I merely cite this as an instance of the difficulty of defining cultural specificity. When there is this kind of interaction in a colonial and post-colonial context, the positing of essences is always suspect, and likely to produce orientalist results.¹⁵

Nowhere is this problem more emphatic than in analysing the relationship between the Hollywood and Hindi industries. While marginal in terms of exhibition and the social depth of their popularity, large numbers of American films flowed into the metropolises in which Indian films were being made. Certain plot similarities have often prompted the conclusion that the relationship has been one of imitation.¹⁶ However, this view fails to see that such borrowings are subject to drastic revision in line with specific conceptions of narrative construction and performance.

As this issue is not the object of this article, I will simply suggest that certain operations in the Hindi film narrative, of the articulation of male narrational authority and its subsequent disavowal, have a lot to do with the relationship between Hindi and American films being one of attraction and denial. The capable, goal-centred hero of mainstream American cinema (leaving aside certain melodramatic revisions of this character) is often stated in the Hindi film – with local inflections – but is displaced at a later point in the narrative. Also crucial is a narrative bipolarity in which the problem of cultural self-identification is central. The opposition between East and West is used to recover, in an often duplicitous, contradictory way, an 'authentic' Indian identity.

I will elaborate on this in the course of my analysis. This will focus on the peculiarities of narrative structure, narrational procedure and the gendering of narrative voice in the Hindi commercial cinema. I will also be examining the ways in which the para-narrative units (song, dance and comic sequences) work to create parallel pleasures, and perhaps to problematise the work of the narrative.

⁶For the impact of the war and the mushrooming of new producers, *ibid.*, pp 127-9

⁷In 1963 it was estimated that there was one cinema for every 86,400 people. *Indian Motion Picture Producer's Association Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1938-63*, Bombay, IMPPA, 1963), p 175. The corresponding figure for the US was 10,500 per cinema

⁸Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976

⁹Rosie Thomas, 'Indian Cinema: Pleasures and Popularity', *Screen*, vol 26, nos 3-4, May-August 1985, pp 116-31

¹⁰*ibid* p 130; see also Gaston Roberge, *Chitrabani: A Book on Film Appreciation*, Calcutta, 1974

¹¹I have used R K Yagnik, *The Indian Theatre: its origins and later development under European influence, with special reference to Western India*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1933, pp 92-117, for the following account

¹²These included 'Persian and Sanskrit mythology and epics, English novels, farces and plays, medieval legends, historical

¹³ *ibid.*, p 110

¹⁴ Christine Gledhill,
'The Melodramatic
Field: An
Investigation', in
Christian Gledhill ed.
*Home Is Where the
Heart Is*, London,
British Film Institute,
1987, p 21

¹⁵ For example, Paul
Willemen's emphasis
on traditional
aesthetics and 'Hindu'
conceptions lacks any
conception of
historical dynamics.
'Notes/Arguments/
Hypotheses' in Paul
Willemen and
Behroze Gandhi ed.
Indian Cinema,
London, British Film
Institute Dossier no 5,
1980 and 1982, pp
33-38

¹⁶ 'Every year, the major
American
blockbusters are
remade almost shot by
shot, but in an Indian
setting'. *ibid.*, p 33

¹⁷ *Devdas*, made by New
Theatres, Calcutta, is
the solitary non-
Bombay production I
have chosen. Its
influence on Hindi
cinema makes analysis
of it indispensable

¹⁸ *op cit.*, p 4

¹⁹ A K Ramanujam
details a number of
oedipus-type tales for
India, the closest of
which privileges the
mother's point of
view. 'The Indian
Oedipus', in *Oedipus:
A Folklore Casebook*,

Narrative structure and narration

I will make the following standard entry-points into the film narratives I'm looking at:

(a) the problem of the male subject as it is articulated in narrative structure; for whom is the story being told?

(b) the problem of the subject as it is articulated by narration; who is telling the story and/or who is determining its eventuation? I shall consider here the implications narrational strategies have for the female subject position.

(c) the mechanisms whereby the narrative moves, the codes it employs to bind spectatorial interest.

To explore these questions, and those on the functions of the para-narrative, I shall refer to two important 'social' films of the studio period, *Devdas* (*Devdas*, PC Barua, 1935)¹⁷ and *Kismet* (*Fate*, Gyan Mukherji, 1943). The rest of the references will be to films of the 1950s, with a few instances of 1970s and 1980s work to elaborate some of the points I am making. The films are: *Aag* (*Fire*, Raj Kapoor, 1948), *Andaz* (*A Sense of Proportion*, Mehboob Khan, 1949), *Deedar* (*Vision*, Nitin Bose, 1951), *Awara* (*Vagabond*, Raj Kapoor, 1951), *Baazi* (*The Wager*, Guru Dutt, 1951), *Shree 420* (*Mr 420*, Raj Kapoor, 1955), *Pyaasa* (*Craving*, Guru Dutt, 1957), *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957), *Saheb, Bibi aur Gulam* (*King, Queen, Slave*, Abrar Alvi, 1962), *Pakeezah* (*The Pure One*, Kamal Amrohi, 1971), *Zanjeer* (*The Chain*, Prakash Mehra, 1973), *Deewar* (*The Wall*, Yash Chopra, 1975), *Sholay* (*Flames*, Ramesh Sippy, 1975), *Muqaddar ka Sikandar* (*Conqueror of Destiny*, Prakash Mehra, 1978), *Shakti* (*Power*, Ramesh Sippy, 1982).

Narrative structure

I won't present the plots of these films in detail but shall merely indicate the major patterns. Peter Brooks' analysis that characters in melodrama take on essential, psychic features of father, mother, child is also applicable to these plot structures.¹⁸ What is played out again and again is the characteristic drama of the family triad: a fearsome father (standing in for the various articulations of Law in its opposition to desire) the nurturing mother and the traumatized son.¹⁹ (still 1)

The male subject moves through an oscillating field within this oedipal trauma. There is the possibility of

(i) renunciation²⁰. In *Devdas*, the hero, unable to realise his desire in the face of the strictures of class laid down by his father, takes to a life of dissolution. In *Deedar*, a poor youth who has lost his sight recovers it only to blind himself again when he realises that the rich woman he desires cannot be his. In *Aag* the hero refuses to follow the career of his lawyer-father, turns to theatre and wins success. However, he discovers that the woman his close friend loves is fixated on him instead; he disfigures



1: 'The characteristic drama of the family triad' (*Aag*, Raj Kapoor, 1948)

his face in order to end the girl's fascination. In the process he burns down the theatre, the very site of the contestation of his father's authority. In *Pyaasa* the hero, a poet, is subject to a symbolic assault by a series of oppressive father figures. An oppositional aspect is lent to the act of renunciation, for it is done at the point when the hero, by the manoeuvring of the very father figures and others who had traumatized him, is given a place in the symbolic order.

(ii) Conflict. In this quite dominant scenario the male subject is implicated in a conflict with the father. This may be done unconsciously, for instance in the stories in which, as a result of a violent primal act of the father, the son has been evicted from the house as a child (*Kismet*, *Awara*), and so doesn't recognise the father when engaged in conflict with him. The aggression may however be conscious, directed against a symbolic father (*Shree 420*, *Mother India*, and a number of 1970s films featuring Amitabh Bachchan). In certain instances a combination of the renunciatory and aggressive features is posed, as in the case of certain of the roles performed by Amitabh Bachchan in the 1970s (*Deewar*, *Muqaddar ka Sikandar*, *Sholay*, *Shakti*). In these stories restitution is never possible for the hero. Fated to live out a drama of 'lack' (of the mother, of the true as opposed to the bad father, of social position) the hero presents the illusion of control, but in a way which re-asserts lack – in all the films mentioned he has to die – and achieves resolution at best for another couple.

Narrational authority and problems of sexual difference

I will divide the narratives schematically into renunciation and identification plots. In the renunciation plot, the hero is incapable of establish-

²⁰ Ramanujam notes that the withdrawal or renunciation of the son in the face of the father's aggression is a characteristic element of stories relating to father-son conflicts. Ibid, pp 244-248. Vijay Mishra has used the term renunciation to identify character types motivated variously by a 'higher sense of duty' and 'self-pity', but he has not looked at the implications of this category for narration. His work is on the mythical antecedents of the Hindi film narrative. 'Towards a Theoretical Critique of Bombay Cinema', *Screen*, vol 26, nos 3-4, May-August 1985, p 140

²¹ There seems to have been a shift in the 1970s to narratives of male friendship (*dostana*). See Thomas' remarks, *op cit*, p 125

²² For the priority of the mother-son relationship, and the various representations it gives rise to, see Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Delhi and New York, Oxford University Press, 1978, esp ch 3

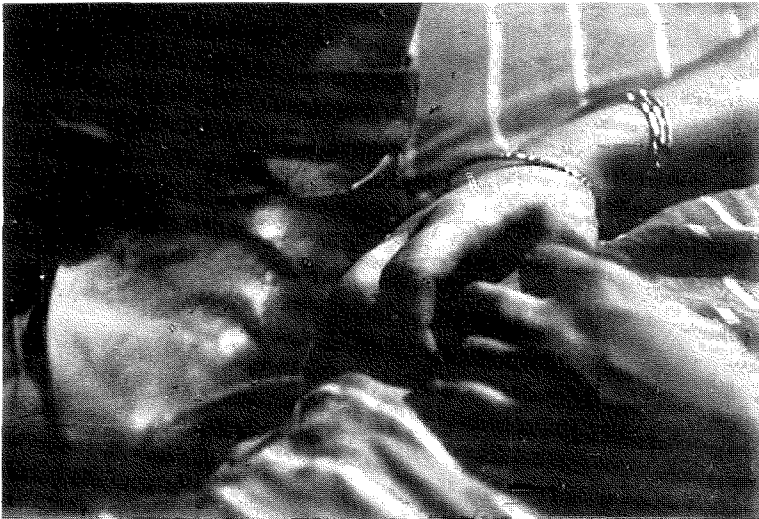
ing his authority on the symbolic terrain. Within these limits, however, he has the capacity to generate female figures who will look after him. These are either presented as simple nurturing figures or, if more active, as the prostitutes Chandra in *Devdas* and Gulab in *Pyaasa* are, then their activity is motivated by the transformations wrought by the hero. The influence of the hero's presence (*Devdas*) and creative expression (in *Pyaasa*, Vijay's poetry) transforms the impure woman into a pure one, eligible to look after the hero. His authority, circumscribed by the father, yet produces a protective field within which the drama of 'lack' is enacted.

In the identification plot, on the other hand, a real shift in authority often takes place. It is as if the authorisation of conflict and resolution by the male subject position is inadmissible; or as if the conflict between father and son is not capable of stabilisation without the arbitration of another figure.

The narrative may produce a mother figure to achieve identity for the male subject (*Kismet*, *Awara*, *Mother India*); however, the figure who would appear eligible to take this position may be rendered unsuitable by various inimical discourses (for example in *Baazi*, wealth, in *Zanjeer*, an excessive femininity). In such instances another (good) father may be produced. This latter figure may correspond to the insertion of the law (as an entity separate from the power of the father) into the narrative (e.g. in *Baazi*) or, if the law itself appears ineffectual (e.g. in certain earlier 1970s work such as *Zanjeer*), then in the figure of another male who understands the logic of the reigning criminal order and can exercise his authority over this (excessively masculine) sphere.²¹ More generally, a figure quite outside the dominant frame of narrative relations, the comic, may fulfil such functions. This is taken up later in relation to questions of performance and narrative integration.

Whether the female subject is significant in narration simply as a nurturing figure, or as the one who takes over narrational authority to achieve identification for the hero, in both instances the male subject is caught within a regressive fantasy. This implies that the underlying objective of the narrative is the achievement of the classical couple as a dyadic fusion of mother and male child.²²

This is indicated repeatedly. In *Devdas*, the hero conceives of his desire for his beloved, Paro, as that of a child for his mother. In *Kismet*, the hero's actions are motivated by the loss of his mother and, in effect, against the depredations of his grasping father. His beloved is the one who can finally correct the various imbalances caused by the father, and thereby fulfils the hero's search for a mother. In *Aag* after the hero disfigures himself, he agrees to a marriage arranged by his parents, to discover, on his wedding night, that he has married the woman he has been in pursuit of since his childhood. She loves him despite his hideous scar. Thus he recovers both the innocent society of childhood and the absolute love of a mother in the same figure. In *Andaz*, the focus on the improper conduct of the heroine brings into question her eligibility not



2-3: The substitute mother's body as the target of evil. In a riot scene towards the end of *Pyaasa* (Guru Dutt, 1957), Gulab (Waheeda Rehman), cast to the ground, looks up in horror, and we see a man's boot crushing her.

only to be a wife but, crucially, to be a mother. In *Awara*, the heroine quite clearly fulfils the functions of the absent wife for the hero's father; and she takes over a knowledge, and fulfils the ambitions (of identification for Raj) that were originally located with his mother. In *Pyaasa*, the hero Vijay's poetry is unacknowledged by the world, and yet admired by a prostitute, Gulab, who offers him the ministering functions his mother can no longer perform. It is she whom Vijay looks to when he renounces the plaudits of a corrupt society. It is in *Pyaasa* that the centrality of the mother to the fiction, as a source of virtue and as

emblematic of that which is most threatened by evil, is horrifyingly rendered; in the stampede which climaxes the confrontation of good and evil in the film, it is Gulab's body which is designated as brutally trampled. (stills 2-3)

This relationship between the hero and the nurturing heroine often carries with it a certain emblematic moment of looking: the woman looking at the man who is unaware of her look, is indifferent to it, or is unable to return it, is representative of a protective field for the male subject. (stills 4-6) This may be observed in both plot types.

This structure of looking presents the possibility of a series of allied functions. Fixing the mother function, its active denial may signify the denial of legitimacy to the woman. For example, a wife is debarred from her husband's presence/sight at the beginning of *Awara*, and dies because she catches his prohibited sight later. In *Pyaasa*, Vijay's ex-lover, Meena, castigated for her desire for wealth over her love for Vijay, is looking at Vijay when a train passes, blocking her view of him. Conversely, the male subject who does not conform to the position of the son may be denied the mother's look, or may even, extending the logic of this structure, be subject to castration (the destiny of the transgressive sons of *Mother India* and *Deewar*).

In the identification plot, when desire is 'legitimate', the woman's look at the unaware protagonist is purely emblematic; it is otherwise returned, though within a narrational strategy which still projects the mother's functions onto her. However, in the renunciation plot the desire expressed by the woman is denied or transformed by the imperatives of this particular variant of male subject construction. Gulab's unreciprocated look at Vijay in *Pyaasa*, played against a song invoking the sensual longing and devotion of Radha for Krishna (mythical lovers), is representative of a larger strategy of denial and transformation. In *Devdas*, the hero often looks away in the face of the prostitute Chandra's desire for him, and yet this very unattainability exercises a power over her, transforming her into a figure who shelters and cares for him. In *Aag* the hero Kewal disfigures himself to arrest the fascination of the actress who loves him; as I have shown, he longs instead for the simpler relationship of a childhood companion. In *Deedar* the Dilip Kumar figure's self-blinding results from the social gulf which makes it impossible to attain the woman he desires. But when he first recovers his sight, and looks at the woman he has so long desired, it is the pre-sexual friend of childhood he sees (stills 7-8): the woman is subordinated to the memory of an imaginary, pre-oedipal relationship. The blinding also functions to maintain a relationship with a dotting country girl who looks after him, a girl whose love he does not reciprocate. In effect the renunciation plot, dealing with the male subject's failure/withdrawal in his contest with the father, inscribes the woman as a figure subordinated to a narcissistic male structure of desire: one in which the male struggles to retain an undifferentiated relation with the mother.²³

²³ The articulation of the mother-child dyad in this construction would suggest a quite different subject positioning from that arising out of the 'phobia attached to the maternal'. This configuration intimates 'annihilation, nothingness, the disappearance of the subject's being'. Mary Anne Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, p 146



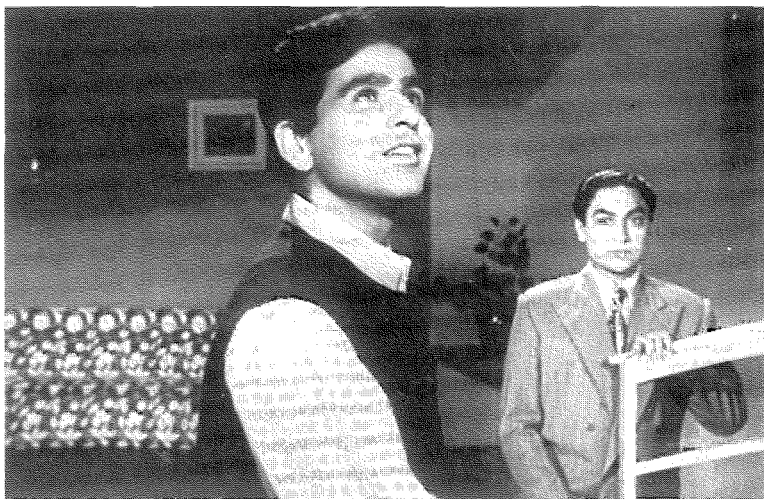
4-6: *The woman looks, the man does not/cannot look back.* 4: paro (Jamuna) has just fainted, as her beloved, Devdas, enters his death throes many miles away. Surrounded by husband and son, her look can be said to be directed to a point outside the frame, one which cannot be returned. (*Devdas*, P C Barua, 1935)



5: The blind hero (Dilip Kuman) and the doting country girl (Nimmi) of *Deedar* (Nitin Bose, 1950)



6: Vijay (Guru Dutt) and Gulab (Waheeda Rehman) in *Pyaasa*



7-8: In *Deedar*, on the hero's recovering his sight, he sees the woman he desires as the pre-sexual childhood friend of his memory.

Narrative mechanisms

(i) The forms of knowledge and their manipulation

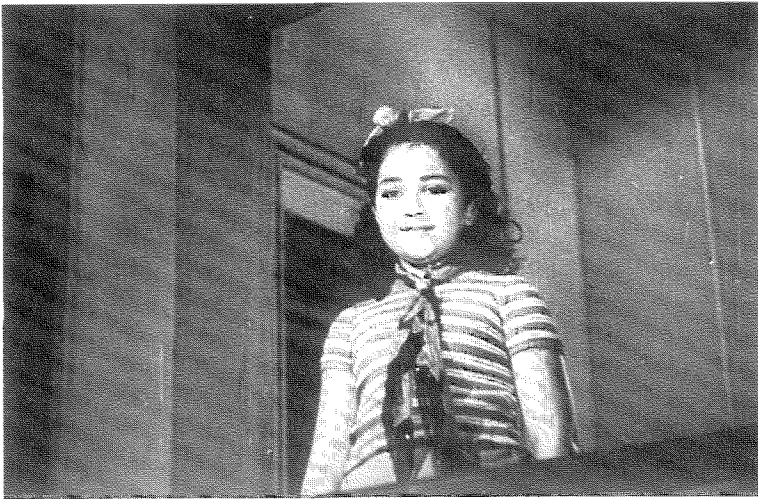
The pattern of the identification plot, in which authority may be shifted onto figures other than the male subject, in a sense constitutes the macro-narrational movement, a movement which does the work of eliding the authority of the male otherwise displayed. The text undertakes a narrative and performative operation which allows for forbidden, transgressive spaces to be opened up – of familial conflict and aggression, of sexuality – and then closes these spaces, re-instituting a moral order.

Often very important to this operation of transgression and denial in the identification plot is the manipulation of knowledge within the narrative. The narration tends to be highly communicative, providing the spectator with information which is denied to the fictional characters.²⁴ These gaps in knowledge in the fiction (misrecognition, misunderstanding in the relation between characters), effect vertiginous displacements in the narrative. Spaces are created – of misrecognition, of displacement of that which would be if knowledge were full. It is these spaces that characters enter in order to work out transgressive functions, revenge fantasies, restitutive deeds, in a kind of playing out of the dream-work.

This blocking of knowledge is rarely informed by that spectatorial compulsion to see recognition take place in the fiction characteristic of Western melodrama²⁵. Rather it allows for a play of fantasy which would otherwise not be possible. However, this does not mean that the communication of the significant knowledge is not important. It is morally necessary that it take place and (generically) understood that it will.

²⁴ This refers to Bordwell's analysis that, unlike the detective film, melodramatic narration tends to be omniscient and highly communicative, thereby privileging spectatorial knowledge. *Narration in the Fiction Film*, London, Methuen, 1985, p 60

²⁵ As suggested by Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen*, vol 27, no 6, Nov-Dec 1986.



There must be a restoration of identities, a normalising, especially of family relations. As I have suggested, the woman's function – or that of other substitute figures – is to bring about this normalisation.

The necessity of this denial of conflict often has the aspect of a normative conclusion; as a result the blocked knowledge tends to be relayed in a peculiarly unsuspenseful way. For example, in *Awaara* and *Baazi*, the identity and virtue of the hero are at stake; the resolution hinges on the acquiring of concealed knowledge by a woman-lawyer and an inspector of police respectively. In neither instance is the method of acquiring the crucial information explained. In *Baazi*, there is a complete indifference to the deductive attributes of the policeman; 'detection' follows upon his instinctive targetting of the real culprit. In *Awaara* it is possible to infer that the woman-lawyer gets the relevant information about the identity of the hero through the hero, who in turn receives it from his mother. However, this is not shown taking place. So suspense as to whether this transmission of information will take place is not built up; it is assumed that it will. What is indicated is a moral universe of definite rules whose authority will be restored, irrespective of contradictions posed in its frame. Enigma²⁶ is thereby underprivileged as a mode of binding spectatorial interest.

What are generally privileged are other, culturally intelligible forms of knowledge. For example, codings of dress – especially for women – are heavily marked in terms of fixing the function of characters, as are certain characteristic oppositions: good and evil, country and city, Indian and Western, purity and sexuality, duty and desire. It is the manipulation of these moral terms that inaugurates the disturbance which it is the narrative's business to neutralise.²⁷ That disturbance does not have to be immediately conveyed in terms of a statement of lack. The codes used guide the spectator, and so a disturbance may be quite economically signalled. For example, at the beginning of *Andaz*, the

²⁶ I refer to the code of enigma as it has been used by Barthes to analyse the classical realist text in the West. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1975

²⁷ Of course this would be true of most classical narrative. It is the absence of enigma – as narrational mechanism rather than as a mystery for the narrative to solve – which would distinguish the Hindi commercial narrative. It is this distinction which Thomas appears to address when she notes that the Hindi cinema emphasises 'a moral disordering to be (temporarily) resolved rather than an enigma to be solved', op cit, p 130

²⁸ In some instances, the widow is actually considered a 'fallen woman', her husband's death interpreted to mean that she had not been entirely true to him. See Veena Das, 'Social Construction of Adulthood' in Sudhir Kakar (ed), *Identity and Adulthood*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp 97-98

heroine is shown wearing riding clothes (Western culture) and riding a horse which goes out of control (sexual excess). We are automatically knowledgeable about the disturbances which are going to rock this particular fictional universe.

In this sense the voice of truth does not have to be revealed to the spectator – it is presented at the start – and the narration's work is to fix it in the fictional world. However, this does not mean that there is an absolute predictability to the narrative. Virtue, truth, clearly registered at the narrative's inception, are embattled, put in danger and subject to a plethora of perils and humiliations. If the source is not in doubt (more likely than not, it is the mother) the strategy the narrative will use to endanger and then recover the virtuous subject is more flexible. As I will show, the oppositions which set up the terms of the subject's oppression are open to ambivalence and require a moral repositioning. In these micro-narrational processes spaces for transgression and conflict are opened up, and with them, opportunities for spectatorial pleasure and identification that will ultimately be disavowed in a cleansing, reaffirming moral conclusion.

Such intermediate confusions in representation are illustrated in *Awara*. Judge Raghunath marries a widow, Leela, against social convention. Leela is kidnapped by the bandit Jagga who has sworn revenge against Raghunath. The bandit discovers that Leela is already pregnant and decides to restore her to her husband, knowing that the fact of her captivity will cast doubt on the child's paternity. Raghunath succumbs to this suspicion and casts the pregnant Leela out. Through all this it is possible to see Jagga acting as Raghunath's double. The doubt he sows about Leela's purity may be interpreted as a return of that which Raghunath repressed when he married – social codes which see the widow as inauspicious.²⁸ Raghunath's expulsion of Leela problematises the good-evil polarity and allows for the attribution of oppressive features to the father. This characterisation is reinforced by the way in which the narrative insistently brings the child, Raj, into contact with his unknown, and aggressively figured, father – a collision course which ultimately leads to the son's murderous attack on him. In a deviation from the patterns of knowledge circulation I have outlined, the attack is performed after Raj discovers that the Judge is his father; he deliberately sets out to kill him to revenge the injustice done to his mother. The attack is undermined by the invocation of the image of Rita, a figure associated with the mother's hopes of recovering for Raj his rightful position in respectable society. Rita's achievement of this task not only redeems Raj; by making the father acknowledge his son, she enables the Judge to reenter the realm of the good.

Rita herself is the ambivalent focus of the opposition between sexuality and purity. While she needs to take over the mother's functions, she cannot remain bound within the attributes of purity associated with the mother figure. The function of sexuality is needed so that she can be a source of oedipal contention between the Judge (her foster father) and

his (unknown) son, Raj. In terms of representation, however, she has to conform to the culturally 'regressive' codings of Western dress (skirts, ballroom gowns, a bathing suit); and so, although the character attributes that come under this representation are crucial to the narrative's recovery of the disinherited son, they must at the same time be punished (Raj hits the swimsuit-clad Rita when she playfully mocks him). From the moment she undertakes the role of restoring Raj to his position she is clad in the traditional sari.

These two examples of contradiction make the point that within the apparently clear moral universe of the Hindi melodrama there is an ambivalence which addresses the forbidden fears, anxieties and pleasures afforded by the narrative – the fear of the father, the attractions of sexuality, the anxiety attached, in the polarity West-East, to the question of identity.

Nowhere is this instability in the process of meaning-making more pronounced than when female desire becomes the focus of narrative attention. In my general formulations about narrative resolution I have suggested how the mother function is often projected onto the female, but that her position is simultaneously marked by a desire subordinated to the narrative requirements of the male subject. I will now look in some detail at *Andaz*, where the second half of the film is dominantly organised around a female viewpoint. The work is doubly significant because it employs a more typically Western melodramatic organisation of knowledge.

(ii) The imperatives of recognition: the problem of female desire

In the first part of *Andaz*, the heroine, Nina, becomes friendly with an attractive young man, Dilip. Dilip assumes she has come to love him, and is then shocked to discover that she is engaged to be married to Raj, who was earlier out of the country. The day after her marriage, Nina, observing Dilip's gloom, tries to draw him out, and, to her dismay, is met by a declaration of love. She emphatically declares her devotion to her husband Raj, but also fears his discovery of Dilip's passion for her. There are moments at which she is on the verge of telling Raj, but cannot. One day, during a power failure, she goes over to a figure she thinks is Dilip and urges him to go away as his presence threatens her relationship with Raj; but it is Raj she has spoken to. Her assertions of innocence and devotion cannot check Raj's estrangement. When Dilip tries to convince him of the truth, Raj is furious and assaults him. On recovering, Dilip is unhinged and tries to force himself on Nina, wanting to believe that she loves only him. To defend herself, Nina shoots him. At the trial, Raj denounces Nina as wanton, corrupted by Western ways; he claims that she killed Dilip to re-establish her virtue. Hearing this, Nina declares she will not defend herself and accepts she is

²⁹ The displacement described here is analogous with Nowell-Smith's usage of the notion of conversion hysteria to suggest how repression is articulated in melodrama: 'In melodrama, where there is always material which cannot be expressed in discourse or in the actions of the characters furthering the designs of the plot, a conversion can take place into the body of the text.' 'Minnelli and Melodrama', in Bill Nichols (ed) *Movies and Methods*, vol II, London, University of California Press, 1985, p 194

guilty. Raj finds a letter from Dilip which makes it clear she was innocent, he rushes back to court, but only in time to hear her being sentenced to life imprisonment. From behind bars Nina tells him not to reproach himself, she was guilty of having adopted customs alien to their land; she urges Raj to protect their little daughter from the contamination of foreign culture.

The first part of the film puts the spectator close to Dilip's position of knowledge. Though there are hints at Nina being involved in another relationship, these tend to be elliptical. The second part, after Dilip's declaration of love, is clearly organised around Nina's fears of exposure. The difficult question, however, is what can be exposed? The true range of the woman's fears are indicated in a displaced, 'hysterical'²⁹ way, through another's voice and through a dream sequence. Nina looks into a mirror, an image of Dilip materialises, declaring his love for her in terms more emphatic and extensive than we had earlier heard him declare. The displacement of the woman's mute – and in fact strenuously denied – desires are projected onto another. Later, and less ambiguously, Nina dreams that she runs, joyously, down the garden steps to Dilip, and is followed by Raj, gun in hand. The two men 'prepare to fight a duel, Nina is a fearful spectator, the outcome is concealed as a gunshot awakens her.

In my formulation, the blocking of knowledge leads to the institution of transgressive spaces in the narratives; in this instance it leads to a familiarity between Dilip and Nina when Nina is already betrothed. That this is a transgression is only known retrospectively, by the woman, when the man declares his love for her. However, from the sequences indicating the ambivalence of Nina's desire, it is clear that her strenuous assertions of duty and constancy to Raj are not only addressed to Dilip but to herself.

The displaced nature of these sequences will suggest how fraught with peril is the space of this transgression, conceived as it is through a female subjectivity. The play of fantasy is attenuated, literally unspeakable. As it is the woman's social ease which has led to this state – an ease associated with 'Western' norms – this must call forth an excessive denial of such norms and of any such ambivalence. The other male figure must be stripped of his attractiveness, he must be unhinged, desire must be unhinged – a transformation effected, brutally, by the aggression of the true husband. And the ambivalence of Nina must be fully excised by her killing of Dilip, thus violently aligning her with the correct position for the female. However, this action is still not enough, it can still be misread by the husband. Knowledge of her virtue comes too late. The woman's acceptance of her guilt is significantly articulated with her reference to the maternal position she has inadequately fulfilled: for she urges the husband to protect the daughter from the errors she had fallen into.

The double articulation of pleasure I have noted as prevalent – a transgression opening up a terrain of inadmissible conflict and desire which

has to be ultimately neutralised – is in a sense reproduced in the female point-of-view narrative. We may see the first part of the film as blocking knowledge in order that the woman may indulge a repressed desire for a man other than her fiancé. However, the risks involved are evidently much more intolerable – to the woman herself – and so there is harnessed the drive to see recognition take place, for normalisation to be achieved. Significantly, virtue can only be recognised after the woman is irrevocably punished.

(iii) Codes of action

How does this broad structure of narration affect the codes of action, the relay belt as it were of narrative construction? The under-privileging of the hermeneutic code tends to suspend motivational mechanisms of a psychological-realist nature. Decisive developments in the narrative are not predicated on the providing, withholding or distorting of information, or on the impact this has on character psychology. As an overt rationale is missing, cause-effect relations have to be looked for in terms of a melodramatic structuring of sequences. The order and succession of sequences reveal the underlying motivations at work. (In American melodrama, such latent cause-effect relations are present as well, but are displaced by an overlay of realist motivation)³⁰.

For example, in *Kismet*, the widowed father of Shekhar, the hero, remarries, the child is beaten by his father for denying his new mother and he runs away from home. Many years later, Shekhar, now a thief, by a chain of exchanges (thefts), encounters an old man who leads him to the theatre owned by his father. Shekhar does not recognise his parents any longer but fixes on the expensive necklace his step-mother is wearing, and steals it. The necklace is ultimately handed over to Rani, daughter of the theatre-owner whom Shekhar's father had supplanted. The ordering of these sequences emphasises the act of stealing. Its function in narrative (as distinct from performative) terms is as a metonymic chain that enables the linking of characters. Thieving is a displaced operation, relating both to a recovery of position lost by the hero (his self-disinheritance), and a relocation of that position with those whom we shall discover are its true heirs.

The pejoratively regarded melodramatic mechanism of coincidence may thus be seen as a structural necessity pared down to certain motivating essences. One of its important functions is in relation to narrative temporality. For example, the apparently arbitrary separation and coincidental reunion of characters is actually motivated by the narrative requiring a certain time to lapse. These durations are related to the evolution of a set of substitutable functions (whether between characters, or within a character) in which the timing of substitution depends on the exhaustion of one figure, the maturation and acquisition of lacking functions in another.

³⁰ In his study of American family melodrama, Thomas Elsaesser has noted: 'Just as in dreams, certain gestures and incidents mean something by their structure and sequence, rather than by what they literally represent, the melodrama often works . . . by a displaced emphasis, by substitute acts, by parallel situations and metaphoric connections'. 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama' in *ibid*, p 180

³¹ Barthes' semic code may be helpful in this context: 'a shifting element which can combine with other similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes, and symbols'; *S/Z*, op cit, p 17

³² The development and accessibility of other media occurred around the same time as the 'all-talking, all-singing, all-dancing' Hindi film. (The reference here is to early sound film advertisements. See Erik Barnouw and S Krishnaswamy, op cit, p 65). The cheaper Japanese phonograph machines were available from 1928, broadcasting started in 1931. Ashok Ranade, 'The Extraordinary Importance of the Indian Film Song', *Cinema Vision*, Bombay, vol 1, no 4, 1981, p 10

This essentialism of character function and action indicates a narrational field in which mechanisms of surprise and suspense are of negligible significance. I will conclude this section by emphasising again that central to narration are culturally intelligible codes which are used in a shifting, contradictory way. They are attached to various figures and then shifted to others³¹, the imperative being to find means to get out of the moral mess that accompanies transgressive operations (of sexuality, revenge against the father, etc). The blockage and unravelling of knowledge are merely the points of departure and arrival for the narrative. A great deal in the way of cultural transaction and disavowal has to take place in the body of the text.

II The place of the para-narrative. Performing narrative, narrativising performance

My analysis of the narrative structures of the Hindi commercial cinema may suggest a greater coherence than actually exists, for the song and dance sequence, and comic insertions are not merely part of a narrative continuum. I would like to examine now how this apparent incoherence refers to a series of narrational positions and terms other than the ones specific to the narrative proper. I shall also suggest the ways in which the para-narrative is both integrated into the narrative and operates a process of identification and pleasure that often literally parallels the work of the narrative.

Performing narrative

There is a grid of performance whose reference points lie both inside and outside the film. This is related to the circulation amongst radio, record and film³² not only of songs but dialogue as well. As a result a dramatic exchange between hero and villain, or an emotional line of dialogue, is often well-known. A more complex knowledge is conveyed around the musical performance. Spectators are aware that the voice singing the song is not that of the filmic performer, but that of a well-known playback singer, some of whom have been dominant over thirty or forty years of film history. Within the spectator-film relationship this presents the possibility of an investment in the performer-singer behind the filmic performance, who can be named, whose work is familiar through the radio, and through countless earlier films.

In narrational terms, this play of a knowledge generated outside the film may in a sense set up another point from which the authority behind the narrative is articulated. The singer is one of a set of extra-textual indices emerging from the cinematic institution. The institution makes a series of non-filmic investments that are integral to its popularity and reception, the multiple positions from which its performance is conducted.

Therefore, even in songs with straightforward narrative functions – as for example those romantic songs marking the division and union of lovers – there is this extra layer of narrational authority, this ‘other’ voice telling/singing the story, standing both inside and outside the filmic text. Film of course adds its own medium-specific layer of authority, that of the simulation of live performance. The particular pleasure created here is indicated by the designation of the song as performance: by the tendency to have the simulation of singing accompanied by the simulation of instrumental performance by the star, sometimes for a diegetic audience.

There may be a complex layering of these intertextually defined positions from which the story is enacted. This is particularly true of the narrational song, the point in the narrative when music is used to interpret the significance of a sequence. Very often in these cases, traditional form – perhaps ‘vulgarised’ in later cinema by integrating it with pop rhythms (in a kind of bricolage effect) – is employed. For example, in *Devdas*, the tradition of the singing mendicant is used to express the significance of Devdas’ departure for the city. In *Awara*, the mother’s expulsion from the father’s house is accompanied by the singing of a song that compares her situation to that of the mythical Sita³³. In *Shree 420*, one of the central song-sequences has Raj singing of his experiences as a socially ignominious figure subject to the arbitrary oppression of the police. The structure of the performance has the diegetic audience (of pavement dwellers) surrounding him as in traditional (and indeed contemporary) folk-theatrical performance.³⁴ Raj’s address circulates, through reaction shots, in the audience and culminates in a direct address to the camera which sets up a relation of correspondence and substitution between internal and external audiences.³⁵ These various instances suggest that cinema not only has a strategy of taking over and implanting itself in other performative media but also constitutes them as narrational instances of its own authority. So, in a sense, instead of introducing discordance or incoherence into reception, the para-narrative inserts the film and the spectator into a larger field of coherence, one that stretches beyond the immediate experience of viewing films.

Narrativising performance

It is possible to separate out, within these general arguments about the functions of music and performance within narration, those performances which are specifically marked as spectacular and non-narrative in the basic structure of their address. The cabaret and the comic sequences are the key ones here.

The cabaret sequence is related to functions of male fetishism of the female body. However, these sequences are often narrativised, for such a fashioning of the female image may be counterposed to the position of the mother. Indicated here is another point for the male subject’s artic-

³³ The group nature of the performance here and the song’s telling of a religious story resembles the performance of narratives called *deval*, though these normally recount stories from the Mahabharata rather than, as here, from the Ramayana. See Komal Kothari, ‘Myths, Tales and Folklore: Exploring the Substratum of Cinema’, in Pradip Krishan (ed.), *Indian Popular Cinema: Myth, Meaning and Metaphor*, India International Centre Quarterly, special issue, vol 8, no 1, March 1980, p 33

³⁴ The mode of address and audience positioning described here is akin to that of the fairly recent (about 150 years old) and still extant folk-theatrical form known as *khyal*. See Kothari, *ibid*, p 36

³⁵ Perhaps this replicates the drive, observed elsewhere, of the film musical to operate an imaginary recovery of the division between producer and consumer that resulted from the transformation of folk into mass art. eg, Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, London and Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1982, ch 1

ulation in relation to the female, one likely to be stated and disavowed. For example, in *Devdas*, the hero has to leave the countryside and his beloved for the city, where he falls into the company of a courtesan. He denounces her impurity, but relies on her, and she turns from her despised profession and becomes a protective figure for him. More generally, the cabaret performer is often placed within a structure of oppositions with the chaste heroine; but in certain instances there may be an overlap of functions, with the heroine indulging in a spectacular demonstration of her sexuality (for which she is likely to be punished) and the vamp redeeming herself by sacrificing her life for the hero.

Such fetishisation may be used subversively. In *Saheb, Bibi aur Gulam*, Chhoti Bahu (Meena Kumari), wife of a landed scion, determines to acquire a sensual image in order to attract the attention of a husband who spurns her and seeks the company of courtesans. This self-fetishisation is used to fix the look of the husband. This draws out the power that such a fetishism potentially holds; the woman's authority in the construction of her image is excessive, beyond the narrative's powers of control. The image tends to float free into a register of sensual, auto-erotic presentation (still 9). The power is however both limited and reversible. The ambivalence is played upon and then punished, with the woman's death. In a later film with the same actress, *Pakeezah*, the first part is dominated by a courtesan's performance, a demonstration of the control exercised by the image over the gaze. This arrangement is disrupted by the subsequent placing of the woman in respectable society, by the triumphant reinstatement of narrative and, indeed, of her (of course!) hitherto unknown father.

Both cabaret and comic sequences often employ direct address in their performance of songs (stills 10-11), and their content expresses the pleasures – of entertainment and sexual fantasy – that they have been

9: The female image floating free into a register of sensual, auto-erotic presentation. Meena Kumari in *Saheb, Bibi aur Gulam* (Abrar Alvi, 1962)





10-11: *Performance and direct address*. 10: Raj Kapoor in *Shree 420* (Raj Kapoor, 1956)



11: Waheeda Rehman in *Pyaasa*

employed to purvey. Take, for instance, the song of Abdus Sattar (Johnny Walker), the wandering masseur of *Pyaasa*, which suggests a strong likeness between the pleasures afforded by head massages and the cinema:

Massages, oil massages, head massages!
If your head's swimming, or your heart's sinking,
don't worry my darling, come to me! . . .
Whoever has his head massaged by me
will have a shining destiny . . .
Listen listen listen, son, listen
a myriad sorrows have a single cure, why not try it . . .

However, despite these straightforward performative functions, the comic too may be articulated with the narrative. He is related to the hero as his distorted mirror image, he who has no heroic propensities, whose romantic forays tend to be spurned or farcical. Further, his positioning in a reassuring parallelism to the narrative proper, enshrining as it were the feature of a purely performative entertainment, may also be reinstated in the narrative precisely to serve the ends of narrative gratification. He may be used to correct the imbalances wrought in the narrative, and to bring the hero out of his travails and back on course to accomplish his objectives. For example, in *Pyasa*, Johnny Walker performs two important deeds. The heroine, Gulab, to be worthy of the hero, Vijay, must cease to work as a prostitute. The comic ensures this by fending off her threatening pimp. Later, Vijay is consigned to a lunatic asylum, and it is Johnny Walker who rescues him.

Parallel pleasures

These comic functions may sometimes work in fact to redeem the narrative from its conclusions. This is especially apparent when the hero in *Awara* fulfils the comic role himself. In our first introduction to the ill-fated Raj, whom we will discover is socially ignominious, is under the control of the bandit Jagga, and has to lie to his mother about his work, he sings the following song:

*I'm a vagabond, a good-for-nothing
or am I a star in the firmament above?*

The duality of the representation here confirms that it is not simply a narrative description of his state, but a star performance that invites a vicarious immersion in the star personality and the pleasure of transgression. This is indicated by the surrogate audience set up in the film in the figure of an old man who fascinatedly watches Raj's pickpocketing activities but scoots when Raj's attention turns to him. And throughout the film, Raj's abilities as a crook are coded as both remarkable and glamorous. This culminates in a splitting of response at the conclusion. In spite of the court's sympathy for the social difficulties he's faced, Raj still has to serve a three-year sentence as punishment for his criminal actions. The conclusion is thus set up for pathos, with the lovers separated by the jail bars, pledging constancy etc. If the pleasure of the uniting of the couple is thus deferred, there is nevertheless another, parallel pleasure presented: Raj, who had earlier given Rita a stolen necklace, now presents her with another one, thus reasserting, within the pathos of their separation, the maintenance of the pleasurable transgressions which have led to his incarceration.

There is nothing ironic in this parallel presentation; it attests to a different ordering of pleasure, one in which it is not contradictory to

move the audience, sometimes within the same sequence, along different trajectories, without the one compromising the other.

In a sense, what may be discerned is a displacement of authorities lost or abdicated in the narrative to these 'other' positions or negotiations of spectatorial involvement. By foregrounding the performative and star elements, the major focuses of attraction, these para-narrative units mark out a realm of fantasy, of vicarious identification and reassurance that allows, alongside the pleasures of lack presented in the narrative, those of coherence and mastery at the level of performance.

Conclusion

It will be clear from the preceding account that the Hindi film melodrama is constructed through rather different narrational mechanisms than those observed for Western cinema. The latter privileges spectatorial knowledge in relation to divisions in character point of view in order to generate the desire to see these divisions bridged in the fiction. Pathos arises out of the denial of this fulfilment. It may even arise out of its fulfilment, if articulated with adequate notations of deferral, difficulty and fantasy. In the Hindi melodrama I have shown how it is not divisions of knowledge which tend to order spectatorial desire. More often than not, such divisions mask family relations and enable transgressive fantasies, the primary one being conflict with the father. However, the recovery of these relations is important in the establishment of the romantic couple, sometimes underlying which is the regressive fantasy of mother and male child.³⁶ It is in this sense that knowledge must be achieved as the necessary stepping stone to fulfilment.

Pleasure tends to have a double articulation. There is the pleasure of the ending, of the narrative closure achieved in the restoration of identities, a pleasure which tends to be of a predictable nature, but none the less fulfilling for that. More profoundly, there is the pleasure afforded by the blocking of knowledge in the fiction. For it is precisely through such gaps in knowledge that the pleasures of transgression are enabled.

Without the pleasure of moral disturbance and of the displacing of identities there would be no cause for narrative, but the pleasure gained from this indicates that closure in the Hindi commercial cinema is a profoundly disavowing operation. The restitution of the bipolarities that define the moral universe of the narrative, effected by deeply contradictory operations, affords a moral confirmation after forbidden pleasures and anxieties have been experienced.

In this arrangement, pathos is not based on the failure to know and to communicate. It arises from the narrative's registering of the moral occult,³⁷ an organisation of perception which articulates primal notations of fear and guilt otherwise repressed by moral censorship. In the Hindi film narrative, this field is also one of transgressive pleasure. The

³⁶ I am referring to a textual operation here, rather than a gendering of - spectatorial position

³⁷ '... the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality ...', Brooks, op cit p5

blocking of the knowledge of identities allows for a fantasy terrain on which battle takes place and the positions of oppressor (father) and victim (son) are outlined. This is at once a fantasy of revenge and power and one of lack, of helplessness, and therefore, of pathos. The conclusion tries to put things back in order. Sometimes there are casualties – bad sons who desire their mothers, sons who never get the mothers they want. Pathos is then maintained. But, quite commonly, the narrative restores positions, achieves recognition and integrates the work it has performed in reassuring ways.

As I have pointed out, a different inflection of the narration is observable when the story is organised around the problem of female desire. The transgression opened up is intolerable, and the pressure to see incommunication resolved and normalcy restored is given priority. However, the more common female function is to fulfil the various needs of the male subject, ranging from offering him the pleasures of sexuality to enabling the restoration of the moral order.

The need for such a closure would indicate the place of the various slips that occur in the narration: the renegotiation of character attributes through a kind of juggling of moral bipolarities; the acquisition and subsequent dislodging of contaminating ‘Western’ characteristics; the statement and then denial of the male subject’s narrational powers. The para-narrative units, especially those involved in fetishistic operations, may in a sense represent the end-term in these processes, a term which threatens to float free of the business of narrative, but then tends to be integrated so that the moral well-being of the spectator may be preserved. However, as I have suggested, the retention of a certain parallelism of pleasures ensures that this disavowal is problematic: the cinema’s performance of transgression lurks within its resurrection of the moral order.

I would like to thank Behroze Gandhi, Richard Dyer, Thomas Elsaesser, Ginette Vincendeau, Radhika Singha and Ulrike Sieglöhr for commenting on earlier drafts of this article.

MELODRAMATIC REALISM: ON SOME FRENCH WOMEN'S FILMS IN THE 1930s

BY GINETTE VINCEDEAU

FRENCH CINEMA NEVER produced a category of films that can be called 'women's film' as Hollywood did in the 1930s and 1940s. Though that category (or sub-genre) itself is ill-defined and subject to controversies, it nevertheless designates films with common features: a melodramatic woman-centred narrative, set in the classic areas of 'women's experience' (the domestic, emotions, romance), and attempting to tell a story from a woman's point of view or, more ambitiously, to portray a woman's subjectivity and desire¹. It is impossible here to go into the complex reasons why such types of narrative were marginal in French cinema during the heyday of the Hollywood 'woman's film', but suffice it to say that the fragmentation of the industry (and hence a less well defined genre structure), intertextual constraints on source material for films, and casting patterns, combined to privilege male-centred narratives.²

Echoing and reinforcing the dominance of male characters in French film, studies of the subject have tended to focus on male protagonists. In particular, the fate of the male working-class 'tragic' hero – archetypally played by Jean Gabin – has been repeatedly read as French cinema's most telling historical symptom. In addition, in France film melodrama has not known the theoretical revival it has enjoyed in Anglo-American studies in the last fifteen years³, and the lack of interest in feminist film theory has meant that the gender politics of the woman's film and questions of gendered spectatorship have not been seen as particularly relevant. Yet women's films were made in France in the 1930s and – this will come as no surprise – they often matched their low critical status with high box-office performance. Marcel Carné scorns his first film *Jenny* as a 'coarse melodrama . . . that I contemplated with dread as you can imagine'⁴ but records that it made seven times its initial budget. *Jenny* (Marcel Carné, 1936) is one of the films I will examine in this article, along with *Hélène* (Marie Epstein & Jean Benoit-Lévy, 1936),

¹For the most recent debates on melodrama and the woman's film, see Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, London, BFI, 1987, Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, Indiana University Press, 1987, *Screen*, vol 29 no 3, Summer 1988

²I have developed this question in 'Daddy's Girls, Oedipal narratives in French films of the 1930s', *Iris*, no 8, second semester 1988. See also Michèle Lagny, Marie-Claire Ropars, Pierre Sorlin, *Général des années 30*, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1986.

³ With the exception of issue 28 (1979) of *Les Cahiers de la cinémathèque* in which of particular interest are Claude Beylie's 'Propositions sur le mélo', Christian Viviani's 'Qui est sans péché. Le mélo maternel dans la cinéma américain 1930-39', and especially Jacques Goimard's 'Le Mot et la chose'. Viviani's article is reprinted in translation in Gledhill, *op cit.*

On early French melodrama, see Richard Abel's 'Scenes from Domestic Life in Early French Cinema' in this issue, and Maureen Turim, 'French Melodrama, Theory of A Specific History', *Theatre Journal*, no 39.3, October 1987

⁴ Marcel Carné, *La Vie à belles dents*, Jean Vuarnet, 1979, pp 70 and 81

⁵ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976, p 14

⁶ Jean Fayard, review of *Fanny, Candide 3* November 1932; Valéry Jahier, 'Angèle', *Esprit*, December 1934, reprinted in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, Princeton University Press, 1988, vol II, p 142; Jean-Paul Liégeois' review of *Jenny* in *Témoignage Chrétien*, 17 April 1936

L'Entraîneuse (Albert Valentin, 1938), and *Angèle* (Marcel Pagnol, 1934), though reference will also be made to a few other films. My choice is determined by their rarity value as woman-centered films, together with the fact that, save from an auteurist angle in the case of *Jenny* and *Angèle*, these superb films (here I have to declare an interest) have been left out of conventional film history. They were all popular successes, except *L'Entraîneuse* but this may well be due to its difficult release circumstances: the fact that it was mostly shot in Berlin was detrimental in the context of the immediate pre-war period.

Second, rather than looking at women's films clearly coded as escapist fantasies, for instance costume dramas such as *Mayerling* (Anatole Litvak, 1935) or *Katia* (Maurice Tourneur, 1938) – though these are equally in need of reassessment – I have decided to narrow the study down to films operating within a realist aesthetic and, more specifically, poetic realism. Although work on melodrama, following Peter Brooks, has revealed its closeness to realism, in particular in its 'effort to make the "real" and the "ordinary" and the "private life" interesting'⁵, French film theory and criticism has concentrated on their mutual exclusiveness – with a tendency to valorise realism (soberness, masculinity, historicity), and deprecate melodrama (excess, femininity, a-historicity). Jean Fayard deploring *Fanny*'s 'lachrymose subject', Valéry Jahier's comment that in *Angèle* 'comedy and pathos follow fast on one another and blend, without any threat of overly melodramatic passages' or a reviewer's regret that Carné in *Jenny* was 'constricted by producers of cheap novellas'⁶ are typical here, condemning the films' melodramatic aspect or struggling to isolate their worth in spite of it. My point is that their melodramatic mode, and feminine focus, is their strongest point of appeal, but also that as melodramas, these films are as historically relevant to the context of 1930s France – and in particular the Popular Front period – as the more classically valued films in the canon of French 1930s cinema (*Quai des brumes* and *Le Jour se lève*, Carné, 1938 and 1939, *La Bête humaine*, Jean Renoir 1938, to name the most famous). Poetic realism, as is well known, focuses on urban industrial milieux, and is, as Dudley Andrew puts it, 'firmly within the world of the everyday'⁷. Yet this world, far from being that of modernity, is one dominated by fate, coincidence, circularity, and nostalgia, the hallmarks of melodrama. As Pierre MacOrlan, the author of *Quai des brumes*, put it: 'In spite of everything, the past still dominates us. The present is submitted to the melancholy of the past, because all the spectacles it generates are comparable to other *déjà vus* spectacles, which stay in the memory, as deeply engraved as words'⁸. But whereas the emphasis on fate and nostalgia in poetic realism is recognised by Andrew and other writers, it is analysed as metaphysical angst, lyricism, the *fantastique*, and of course 'poetry', rather than melodrama. The feminine focus of films such as *Jenny* and *L'Entraîneuse* helps see the profoundly melodramatic nature of poetic realism, hidden or repressed in analyses of the more classic titles.

Like all melodramas, *Angèle*, *Jenny*, *Hélène* and *L'Entraîneuse* dramatise primary psychic conflicts which easily lend themselves to analysis in terms of archetypal male scenarios in which women are objects of exchange or sites of projection of male anxieties and fantasies (and they are, with one exception, written and directed by men). For example, *Angèle* goes from her father to the 'wrong' man and finally to the 'right' one. Suzy's trajectory in *L'Entraîneuse* can be studied in terms of how her desire is determined and then blocked by several father figures. However, the films also offer themselves as discursive practices addressed to women. As Christine Gledhill points out, 'The figure of woman, which has served so long as a powerful and ambivalent patriarchal symbol, is also a generator of female discourses drawn from the social realities of women's lives – discourse which negotiate a space within and sometimes resist patriarchal domination'.⁹

In the context of a male-dominated cinema, as indicated above, the women's films I am considering designated areas of femininity and clearly addressed a female audience. They did so by their titles¹⁰: heroines' names, or female occupations (an *entraîneuse* is a 'hostess'/call-girl). They did so too by the choice of lead actresses: though there were important differences in their performance styles, Françoise Rosay, Madeleine Renaud, Michèle Morgan, Orane Demazis, were all popular actresses whose screen personae had associations with similar 'women's film' roles. Rosay for example starred, before *Jenny*, in three melodramas that can be called 'maternal': *Maternité* (Jean Choux, 1934), *Pension Mimosas* (Jacques Feyder, 1934), and *Marie des angoisses* (Michel Bernheim, 1935); she was also, unusually at the time for a mature woman, cast in a number of sexually 'marked' parts, such as *Le Grand jeu* and *La Kermesse héroïque* (Jacques Feyder, 1933 and 1935) or *Coralie & Cie* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1933). Orane Demazis in *Angèle* reprised the illegitimate mother of *Fanny* (Marcel Pagnol, 1932). Madeleine Renaud in *Hélène* recalled her 'independent' persona of *Maria Chapdelaine* (Julien Duvivier, 1934), *Le Tunnel* (Kurt Bernhardt 1933), and *La Maternelle* (Jean Benoit-Lévy & Marie Epstein, 1933). Michèle Morgan, like Danielle Darrieux, epitomised visions of the 'modern' young woman; Morgan in predominantly melodramatic parts (*Gribouille*, Marc Allégret 1937), Darrieux with a tendency to light comedy, but with overlaps with Morgan, for instance in *Abus de confiance* (Henri Decoin, 1937) where she wears the black beret and plastic raincoat (emblems of the 'lost girl') popularised by Morgan in *Quai des brumes*.

The heroines of the films under discussion also possess to various degrees the dual status of pawns in male scenarios and carriers of discourses relevant to the social reality of their contemporary female audience outlined by Christine Gledhill – a relevance one can assess, for instance, by confrontation with contemporary social and legal structures, as well as discourses in other, more gender-specific media such as

⁷Dudley Andrew, 'Poetic Realism', in Mary Lea Bandy (ed), *Rediscovering French Film*, Museum of Modern Art, 1983

⁸*Pour Vous*, 14 January 1932

⁹Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', in *Home Is Where The Heart Is*, op cit, p 37

¹⁰ Audience surveys in the 1930s concluded that apparently 25 per cent of spectators (this is not specific to France) saw a film on the strength of its title alone. Quoted in Jacques Durand, *Le Cinéma et son public*, Sirey, 1958, p 161



Françoise Rosay in *Jenny* (Marcel Carné, 1936)

¹¹ *Pour Vous*, 9 April 1936

women's magazines. Very strikingly, these films dramatise a powerful tension between rigid 'Victorian' values about motherhood, female sexuality, and women's work, and a critique of their inadequacy, together with hints of alternatives, a tension between nostalgia for a vanished order and a real desire for modernity. Not surprisingly, the focus on nostalgia falls upon the figure of the mother.

Although it was Marcel Carné's first film, billed as a 'quintessentially young film'¹¹ *Jenny* already exemplifies the nostalgic and pessimistic mood of the Carné-Prévert collaborations to follow, in particular *Quai des brumes* and *Le Jour se lève*, though unlike these two films, its 'hero' is a woman. Jenny (Françoise Rosay) runs a nightclub/brothel, a fact she is trying to conceal from her respectable grown-up daughter Danielle (Lisette Lanvin) who, after living in London as a concert pianist, has suddenly come back into her life. Danielle finds out, however, in a climactic scene where, from behind a curtain, she is mesmerised by the spectacle of her mother clad in a revealing satin dress, drinking champagne and laughing wildly, while flirting with a customer. This 'primal scene' is immediately followed by her meeting and falling in love with Albert (Albert Préjean), none other than her mother's gigolo; only Jenny however is aware of this coincidence, and in a reversal of the above scene, she watches, unseen, her daughter and Albert together. Albert, now a reformed character, and Danielle will go to London to 'start a new life'.

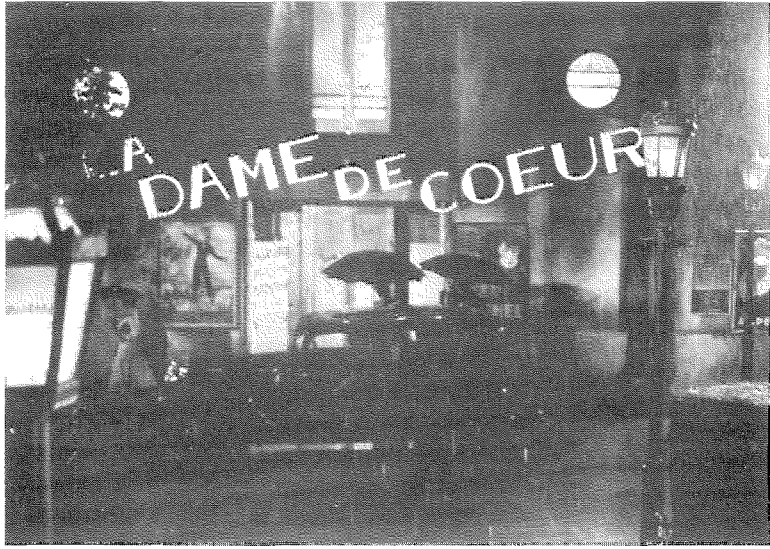
The narrative of *Jenny* is a variation on the archetypal *Madame X*

scenario of motherly sacrifice 'in the child's interest' – analysed by Christian Viviani as 'touching the spectator by appealing to the "Oedipus" in him'.¹² Apart from the obvious fact that such a scenario would equally touch female spectators, *Jenny* provides clearly marked points of identification for women both from the mother's and daughter's points of view. If the narrative delineates, for the daughter, a fantasy of leaving behind the mother and her unhealthy milieu for a 'clean' life – a classic scenario of separation analysed in Hollywood cinema by Mary Anne Doane¹³ – its *mise-en-scène* tells the more ambiguous story of the difficulty of that separation. Mother and daughter are visually and aurally closely bound. A plangent popular song is heard, in English, in the opening scene in London where the daughter is walking in a melancholy fashion as her lover is rejecting her. The next scene shows Jenny in Paris, gazing sadly out of her window at a little street singer, singing the same song, this time in French. Throughout the film the bond between mother and daughter is shown to be strong, and resistant to the daughter's discovery of her mother's 'scandalous' life. The end of the film shows Jenny sadly walking the Parisian streets, echoing her daughter at the beginning, and mother and daughter both have a circular trajectory: Jenny goes back to the club, Danielle to London. The pathos-filled ending (Jenny has lost both daughter and lover) is ambiguous, though, in another way. Unlike Stella Dallas who is left with nothing, Jenny returns to her night club which has been shown by the *mise-en-scène* to be the site of her pleasure and, indeed, of her power. We have seen her partner Benoît (Charles Vanel) begging her to return, and the last shot of Albert shows him hardly triumphant: wounded in a hospital bed, he is still – unwittingly – dependent on Jenny's money. In each crucial scene involving discovery and knowledge, the look is given to one of the women, constructing female points of view, even though female sexuality – metonymically and metaphorically represented by *Chez Jenny* – is also, as in so many instances, a site of projection of male desires and anxieties, combining the forbidden with the pleasurable and the dangerous.

The populism that informs poetic realism traditionally collapses popular (working-class or petit-bourgeois) urban milieux with criminality. *Jenny* is no exception; while the brothel is situated in the wealthy 16th arrondissement (accurately enough, but also no doubt an anti-bourgeois dig by the scriptwriter Jacques Prévert), it is run by working-class characters, including Jenny, recognisable through iconography and accents. Albert, like Jean Gabin in so many films, condenses both sides of this dichotomy here also split between mother and daughter. Albert's rejection of crime and espousal of 'clean' working-class living (whose sign is that he will get his hands dirty) is represented by a geographical move from the cosy 'cell' of *Chez Jenny* – the film's original title was 'The Velvet Prison' – to the canal banks of north-east Paris in a celebrated location-shot long walk with Danielle. The elegiac nature of these shots (accompanied by music), however, make the views

¹² Christian Viviani, 'Who is without sin?', in Gledhill, *op cit*, p 83

¹³ Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, in particular chapter three, 'The Moving Image: Pathos and the Maternal'



The nightclub in *L'Entraîneuse* (Albert Valentin, 1938)

of the real industrial landscape into an aesthetic spectacle rather than a depiction of a working environment (a point applicable to other poetic realist films).

Even more clearly than *Jenny* (in that it contrasts it with the sun-drenched Riviera), *L'Entraîneuse* allies pessimistic populism to the nexus of Paris, night-life, spectacle, and crime, here again combined in a nightclub, called *La Dame de Coeur*. And, as in *Jenny*, that place is associated with a mother figure, the extremely pathetic chanteuse Fréhel. *L'Entraîneuse*, like *Jenny*, also has recourse to the figure of the prostitute. The film, directed by Albert Valentin, is based on an original script by one of the star scriptwriters of the 1930s, Charles Spaak (it is incidentally reminiscent of Dorothy Arzner's *The Bride Wore Red*, made in 1937, itself based on a Ferenc Molnar play which might have been known to Spaak). Suzy (Michèle Morgan) is a dissatisfied hostess/call-girl who works at *La Dame de Coeur*. A gift from a rich friend allows her to go on holiday on the French riviera, where she befriends a group of upper middle-class people, concealing her 'true' identity, even though one of her old friends (Marcel, a petty crook, played by Andrex in a similar part to the one he plays in *Angèle*) is coincidentally around. She lives blissful days, falls in love with Pierre, a young man from the group, but the idyll is shattered by the arrival of Pierre's father, a client who had tried to seduce her at the club, to which she then has to return. In an ambiguous ending, she is fired from the club and accepts the offer of a friendly trip round the world; but she has lost Pierre and the promise of a 'new' life.

The narrative of *L'Entraîneuse* is devoted to Suzy's attempt and failure to escape her 'condition'. But Fréhel's presence at the very beginning and end of the film, though limited in screen time, is crucial



Fréhel (left) and Michèle Morgan (centre) in *L'Entraîneuse* (Albert Valentin, 1938)

and powerfully evocative through the heavy pessimism of her type of chanson commonly known as 'realist' but actually redolent of the ironic pessimism of 19th-century melodrama¹⁴. As in *Jenny*, the mother (figure) is linked by the *mise-en-scène* to the daughter (figure) through a song, whose title, *Sans lendemain* (without tomorrow), is programmatic of both their trajectories. The figure of the *chanteuse* is thus called upon to evoke the pathos of the female loser, yet in a way which is pleasurable (for a French audience at least, as Fréhel was very popular) in offering a spectacle both within and outside the narrative, directly addressing the spectator and referring to an older entertainment form.

In a different but related style, *Angèle* also combines a nostalgic vein with a concentration on the figure of the mother. Directed by Marcel Pagnol in 1934, *Angèle* is the story of a farmer's daughter (Angèle/Orane Demazis) who is seduced by a migrant worker/pimp from Marseilles (Louis/Andrex), has a child and becomes a prostitute. The simple farm hand (Saturnin/Fernandel) brings her back but her father, who is devastated by her 'sin' and locks them both away. Angèle and the baby are rescued by Saturnin, another farm hand, and a young man (Albin/Jean Servais) who marries Angèle and adopts the baby. *Angèle* is a film generally noted for its 'pre-neo-realist' qualities (the story is set among farmers, and shot on location, including the indoor scenes on the farm). Yet the most striking aspect of its *mise-en-scène*, despite the emphasis on lengthy dialogues typical of Pagnol, is the use of theatrical tableau-like compositions in certain key scenes, for example Angèle's seduction by Louis, in which the characters are starkly lit against a very dark (night-for-night) background and the actors strike particularly emphatic poses.

Pagnol's films noticeably cling to a rural, archaic world, where evil

¹⁴ I have developed this aspect of French songs in 'The *mise-en-scène* of suffering, French realist *chanteuses*', *New Formations*, no 3, Winter 1987. See also Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field', *op cit*, p 20

¹⁵ See Claudette Peyrusse, *Le Cinéma méridional 1929-1944*, Eché, 1986

¹⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'melodrama in and out of the home', in *High Theory/Low Culture*, edited by Colin McCabe, Manchester University Press, 1986, p 86

¹⁷ Dudley Andrew makes the point that 'the bucolic lyricism of Marcel Pagnol and the tragic naturalism of Renoir (...) clearly belong to an era dominated by that school, by its conception of story and character, by its attention to evocative physical detail'. In 'Poetic realism', op cit, p 116

¹⁸ *Pour Vous*, 28 January 1933. Also mentioned in Marcel Pagnol, *Confidences*, Julliard, 1981

¹⁹ See Abel's 'Scenes from Domestic Life . . .' in this issue, and Paul Monaco, *Cinéma and Society: France and Germany during the Twenties*, New York, 1976

²⁰ Quoted in James McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot. The Place of Women in French Society 1870-1940*, The Harvester Press, 1981

comes from the city, something characteristic also of other films in the genre of southern (*méridionaux*) French films¹⁵; interestingly, in view of their totally different film style (long takes as opposed to editing), they can also be read in the light of Laura Mulvey's comments about DW Griffith, as films evidencing 'a desperate refusal to acknowledge the modernity of the cinema, the contemporary world and its aesthetics and, particularly, a new and changing concept of womanhood'¹⁶; like the seducer in Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920), Louis comes from the city – here the red light district of Marseilles. However, the melodramatic structure allows these 'Victorian' values to be challenged within the film itself. Angèle is the typical powerless victim with whom the spectator sides, and the very excessiveness of her overbearing father's punishment offers an inbuilt critique of his values (he is also symbolically wounded, with an arm in a sling as soon as Angèle has 'sinned'). Although *Angèle* structurally depicts the tragedy of a woman between three men (her father, Louis, Albin), it also gives a significant space to her discourse. The fact that Marcel Pagnol's cinema is overwhelmingly a male cinema and that it has been claimed as a formative influence on French realism and Italian neo-realism, and has been characterised as a 'rural' branch of poetic realism,¹⁷ has tended to obscure the fact that it is also a very melodramatic cinema, and that indeed some of his films are powerful *women's* films. *Fanny* (1932), the central part of the *Marius-Fanny-César* trilogy, and the most woman-centred of the three, was also the most successful at the box-office; it was voted best film of 1932 by readers of *Pour Vous*¹⁸.

The central figure in *Angèle*, as in *Fanny*, is that of the illegitimate mother. However, unlike Anna/Lilian Gish's baby, Angèle's doesn't die – on the contrary it lives to re-unite the divided family; in addition, Angèle ultimately escapes punishment and the film has a 'happy end'. This scenario was extremely widespread in French cinema¹⁹ and it is sufficiently different from the dominant Hollywood to be read against contemporary French attitudes regarding motherhood. France in the 1930s was a country where repeated state intervention (culminating in 1939 with the *code de la famille*) in favour of increased progeny failed to counteract a deeply ingrained Malthusianism; thus, despite defying moral and religious conventions, the illegitimate mother and child seemed to be not only acceptable but a figure of unity and renewal. A book written in 1920 by Martin de Tourna even encouraged unmarried women to have children and urged bourgeois society to show respect for them²⁰. It would be unwise to read this as progressive, given the uncomfortable closeness to contemporary fascist policies, but one of the side effects is clearly a loosening of moral strictures as far as women are concerned. *Angèle*, *Fanny* and later *La Fille du puisatier* (1941) repeat the same scenario which can be read at a different level: motherhood as evidence of the daughter's sexuality is unacceptable to the father. This is visualised in *Angèle* by her relegation to the margins of the father's house (the stable – with clear religious references – the cellar, the attic), but it



'Sin in the city'; Andrex (centre) and Orane Demazis (right) *Angèle* (Marcel Pagnol, 1934)

is acceptable to the mother, though within Pagnol's films the older mother's role is always very marginal. The heroine's sexuality is thus still strictly bound within a male Oedipal scenario, another important aspect of French films of the period, though not one I am concentrating on here.

An even more radical attitude to illegitimate motherhood is exemplified by *Hélène*, an exceptional film on several accounts, not least for being co-directed by Marie Epstein, one of very few women directors in the 1930s²¹, and someone who consistently showed an interest in social issues relevant to women in her films, including the celebrated *La Maternelle* (1933). *Hélène* is typical of the realist type of women's fiction (it is based on a novel by Vicky Baum) in that it depicts a women's triumph over material and emotional hardship through strength of character and education. It is also, however, melodramatic in structure, with coincidences and hyperbolic situations, as well as in tone, including a number of excessive performances (notably by Jean-Louis Barrault). *Hélène* Wilfur (Madeleine Renaud), is an impoverished but brilliant medical student in Grenoble, writing a thesis under the supervision of a great scientist, the Professor Amboise (Constant Rémy) who disapproves of women students. She falls in love with a fellow student, Pierre Régner (Barrault) who, after failing his exams, commits suicide, just as she is about to tell him that she is pregnant. She goes back to work, has a child and passes her doctorate with distinction. Meanwhile Amboise, distraught at his wife leaving him, almost kills himself. When he recovers he decides to give up his work. *Hélène* encourages him to carry on,

²¹ Only two other women directed features in France in the 1930s: Solange Bussi (*La Vagabonde*, 1931), and Marguerite Viel (*La Banque Némé*, 1934); a few others – Lucie Derain, Lucette Gaudard, and Claudine Lenoir – made short films. Marie Epstein's main features, apart from *La Maternelle*, are *Itto* (1934), *La Mort du cygne* (1937), *Altitude 3200* (1938), *Le Feu de paille* (1939); all were co-directed with Jean Benoit-Lévy. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis's book *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema*, partly devoted to Marie Epstein's films, is due to be published at the end of 1989 (University of Illinois Press), but it wasn't available to me at the time of writing

which he agrees to do only if she will work with him. The unusual aspect of the film's attitude to motherhood is that, rather than being a central definition of the heroine – as in *Angèle* or *Jenny* – it is treated as entirely secondary to her career ambition. As a woman-motivated narrative, *Hélène* is the flip side of *L'Entraîneuse*: she is successful where Suzy fails, in escaping her 'condition' – here material poverty. Both films, however, are comparable in channelling the heroine's desire through discourses about the 'new woman'. In this, and in their choice of leading actresses – Madeleine Renaud and Michèle Morgan – the two films can be seen as addressing women spectators about changing definitions of femininity in France in the late 1930s (even though these two women characters at the same time clearly function as 'powerful and ambivalent patriarchal symbols' as defined by Christine Gledhill).

The New Woman

The 1930s (and 1940s) were in several ways the low ebb of women's condition in France, between a modest flourishing of feminism at the turn of the century and in the 1920s, and important changes at the end of the Second World War: the vote, increased legal rights, and the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949. In the 1930s women were legally more oppressed in France than in other advanced countries and even the Popular Front government of 1936-1938, which fundamentally improved workers' social conditions, left women's situation practically unchanged. At the same time, though, new discourses aimed at women were beginning to define ideas of modernity in relation to work, the family, and personal grooming. These are particularly evident in the press specifically aimed at women, and all the more so since the late 1930s saw the successful launch of some of the first mass circulation women's magazines in France: *Confidences* (1938) and the more middle-class *Marie-Claire* (1937); the July 1989 issue of *Marie-Claire* recalls how 52 years ago, 'Marie-Claire gave its readers a wider perspective on the world from which they were so often excluded'. What emerges most clearly from the *Marie-Claire* issues of 1937-1939 is the tension between ideas of modernity and the conservative structures of Third Republic France, and in particular the clash between the new lifestyle and reactionary statements, in the pages of the very same issues. Women seeking advice were firmly told to maintain the home for the sake of husband and children, by writers of repute such as François Mauriac who wrote 'Peace in a home depends on the wife and mother. Women don't always realise their responsibility in this respect'.²² However, stories about women working (which tended to be written by women) ambiguously emphasized pleasure in competence and newly gained independence, while carefully placing the heroine in positions still separate and slightly subservient to the man, repeatedly playing out the fantasy of a woman asserting her independence, via her job and often

²² *Marie-Claire*, 2
September 1938

by leaving a stale marriage, only to come back to the fold, having 'realised' her error²³.

Such tensions inform *Hélène*. As a future doctor, Hélène is definitely a 'new woman' making it in a male world at a high level, and fighting men for her rights (which she does repeatedly throughout the film). Her desire to become a doctor, expressed at the beginning of the film, against Amboise's pronouncement that it isn't a suitable job for a woman, is fully realised and without her renouncing anything. We have also seen how there is no stigma attached to her being a single mother. In addition, even the 'bad woman' of the film, the professor's wife, realises her working ambition to become a famous opera singer (here, as in *L'Entraîneuse*, the woman's voice is given special power; it is while he hears her sing on the radio that Amboise almost kills himself by crushing a phial of poison). Apart from addressing women spectators through the discourse of the triumphant heroine, *Hélène* also abounds in shots expressive of Hélène's own sensual pleasure: repeated point-of-view shots of her looking at Régnier from her window, or rolling in the grass. By comparison, the male characters are images of pathos, failure and disease; Régnier fails his exams and commits suicide, his father is terminally ill, one of the students' aeroplane crashes, and the professor's experiments are inconclusive. The icon of certainty and success in the film is the white-coated Hélène, echoed in a prominently displayed photo-

²³ For instance '*La Secrétaire et son secret*', *Marie-Claire*, 3 February 1939.

Madeleine Renaud in the late 1930s





'The "new woman" and images of leisure in the 1930s': Michèle Morgan in skiing outfit.

graph on Régnier's piano. Madeleine Renaud's off-screen persona also probably helped a positive reading by women spectators. She told an interviewer at the time of the release of the films: 'Shooting the film with [real] students has confirmed what I always thought, all women must have a job... the Comédie Française hasn't stopped me being a good mother'²⁴.

On the other hand, Hélène's iconic power is balanced by her exceptional status, her rejection of her friend Valérie, who is coded as an embittered lesbian spinster, and the ambivalent ending of the film. The professor, his wounded arm a symbolic castration like Angèle's father, dominates the frame above her as she is seated. His last words, and indeed the last in the film, are 'You are a woman, a real one'. This patriarchal seal of approval echoes many stories in the women's magazines mentioned above: by reinstating him in his position and propping him up, she has accepted her 'proper' place (obeying the laws of verisimilitude: there had been woman consultants since 1930, but the first woman professorial chair in medicine was granted only in 1959), and symbolically she has formed a family – complete with male child – replacing the two unsatisfactory couples of the film; this is a structure found in many instances of modern realist women's fiction, where women negotiate for themselves a satisfactory place in patriarchy while creating and propping up the 'good home'²⁵.

With respect to discourses on the 'new woman', *L'Entraîneuse*, made two years after *Hélène*, might appear as a regression with its recourse to the figure of the prostitute. Yet it also activates a very modern fantasy for 1938. The middle section of the film which takes place on the seaside brings to the screen images of modernity present in *Pour Vous* and *Marie-Claire*; indeed Michèle Morgan was one of the first French film stars to figure on the cover of *Marie-Claire* in November 1938, and Charles Spaak declared that he had tailored the character of Suzy to fit her image. In the *Côte d'Azur* section, Suzy and her friend Lucienne are the essence of the modern woman: slim, tanned, cycling, playing tennis, modelling swimsuits on the beach – the exact opposite of the Fréhel figure who is only seen indoors and at night, and who is older and fat. The latter point is not trivial; one of the most vivid examples of conflicting ideas of femininity to be found in *Marie-Claire* is the presence, sometimes on the same page, of features on slimming – then a novelty in France – and of advertisements for *fattening* pills whose origin is betrayed by their Art Nouveau layout and typeface.

Crucially, the young woman's desire for change, granted in *Hélène*, ambiguously expressed in *Jenny*, blocked in *L'Entraîneuse*, is related to class (only *Angèle*, set in the peasantry, departs from this model; there, ideas of progress are linked to different types of land). These films generate fantasies that are in effect middle-class and linked to new forms of consumerism. At the same time, the common motifs of nature and fresh air, of walking or cycling holidays in the mountains or by the sea, are also related to the Popular Front government's bid to regenerate French

²⁴ Madeleine Renaud, interview, in *Le Journal*, 3 November 1936

²⁵ Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field', *op cit*, p 34

society, to take it out of its 'unhealthy' past (alcoholism on the social scene becomes prostitution in the films) through education or wealth. Even though *L'Entraîneuse* takes the heroine back to her 'past', by far the largest section of the film is devoted to the 'future' or at least a glimpse of its possibilities, but with a trenchant class delineation. Suzy's downfall is uncompromisingly attributed to the corruption of the moneyed upper-middle class father in a narrative where the circulation of money and its power over women is made extremely clear. Characters in all these films are precisely located in their social and economic background: the old teacher in *L'Entraîneuse*, or Régnier's father in *Hélène*, are little vignettes of the struggling lower middle-classes; as Jenny says to the Charles Vanel character: 'We're going through a depression . . . do you know what that means?.'

In the films discussed above, a female discourse is not so much denied as shown to be successful when prepared to negotiate a space within the patriarchal structures at the disposal of the heroine. This involves, for her, accepting mechanisms of repression which are both part of male Oedipal scenarios and realistically motivated in the contemporary society. However, at the same time melodrama's characteristic ability to expose diametrically opposed points of view allows it to function also as a discursive practice addressed to female spectators in ways which are not necessarily oppressive or masochistic, as we have seen. However, a proper account of the female discourses offered by French women's films of the 1930s would necessitate extending this analysis in two directions. First, by looking at other women-orientated genres, such as costume dramas, romance, and light comedy. In the latter case, for instance, a number of films starring Danielle Darrieux – *Mauvaise graine* (Billy Wilder, 1934), *Club de femmes* (Jacques Deval, 1936), and *Un Mauvais garçon* (Jean Boyer, 1936), offer in light comedy mode another version of the 'new woman': a playful but unruly young woman, often in a traditionally male job (lawyer for instance); the persona, together with Darrieux's performance style, deserves close attention²⁶.

The second aspect takes us back to the question of poetic realism raised at the beginning of this article. In French films of the 1930s, some of the values of the woman's film are often taken on by male characters in 'male melodramas', where suffering and emotions are equally shared by men and women or wholly endorsed by men. While this is to some extent true of all melodrama, I believe this is more marked in French film. Amboise in *Hélène* is moved to tears by his wife's voice and the sight of his laboratory (and in a reversal of traditional gender values, he declares that work satisfaction is not enough). But in other, classic, French films of that period, in *Quai des brumes*, in *Le jour se lève*, in *La Bête humaine*, in Pierre Chenal's *Crime et châtiment*, in Grémillon's *Gueule d'amour*, in Pagnol's *La Femme du boulanger*, etc, the central male characters are also figures of pathos and suffering, 'haunted by the

²⁶ Françoise Audé examines the Darrieux figure in some of these films in her article 'Elles', *Mémoires d'en France*, Aimo, 1986

past' as MacOrlan put it. And the *mise-en-scène* of these films confines them to the traditional enclosed spaces of womanhood: Angèle's father is mostly seen in his kitchen, Gabin is stuck in his bedroom in *Le Jour se lève*, or to small dingy cafés in *Quai des brumes* and *Gueule d'amour*, Raimu to his bar and kitchen in *Marius-Fanny-César*, or his workshop in *La Femme du boulanger* (he even sleeps in his kneading-trough). Like Suzy in *L'Entraîneuse*, these characters' trajectories are blocked, a well-known fact which, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, has been read as a historical symptom. While I do not deny the validity of such readings, I would like to draw attention to the similarities with women's films such as *L'Entraîneuse* or *Jenny*, obscured by the semantic shift (traced by Jacques Goimard²⁷) in French analyses of the genre in theatre and film, which have split 'melo' from 'drama'. Thus Gabin in *Le Jour se lève* is 'tragic' but Rosay in *Jenny* is 'lachrymose'.

The widespread use of the melodramatic in French cinema of this period should of course be viewed in the larger context of cinema in the 1930s, privileging intimate melo/drama, film noir, etc, over large-scale action genres, and of the political and economic context of the period. But it also shows greater continuity between French film and stage melodrama's 'Victorian' values, and in particular ideas of the 'universal home'²⁸, of caring and nurturing being shared by men and women. In this respect, both women's films and male melodramas of that period of French cinema are evocative in their narrative, but also in their spectator address, of a lost era of a more generalised and direct emotional appeal, which the following account of a visit to a popular Parisian cinema captures well: 'I went in the evening to one of those local cinemas crammed with families who come with their own food provisions. During the interval they eat *saucisson* and drink red wine. But they all laugh their heads off at the gags of the comic film. And they become silent in front of the innocent, unreal, and sentimental conflicts of the dramatic film. A profound and religious silence falls, interrupted only by little dry coughs and the noise of handkerchieves'²⁹.

I would like to thank Carol Jenks and Simon Caulkin for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

²⁷ Jacques Goimard, 'Le Mot et la chose', *Cahiers de la Cinémathèque*, no 28, 1979

²⁸ Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field', *op cit*, p 36

²⁹ *Pour Vous*, 15 December 1932

BLISS WAS IT IN THAT DAWN?

KEITH READER REVIEWS JONATHAN BUCHSBAUM'S 'CINÉMA ENGAGÉ: FILM IN THE POPULAR FRONT'

The postal delivery that brought this book to review also brought the programme for the National Film Theatre's season to celebrate the bicentenary of the French Revolution – a coincidence to remind me of how rich a harvest the past few years have yielded for French 'anniversarians'. 1989 follows immediately on the twentieth anniversary of the May events, and only three years after the fiftieth anniversary of the Popular Front – the latter largely neglected in France because of the then strongly anti-socialist political climate. Buchsbaum, who was completing his research in Paris in 1986, tells us in his preface that his friends there 'viewed the return of the Right as a kind of inevitable slide consequent to the failure of the socialists to change French society', and that it was thus for him as though he 'had lived through an echo of the material I was working on from fifty years ago'.¹

The material in question, as Buchsbaum's book makes clear, ranks among the most important and prolific attempts to devise new types of progressive film-making, which garnered support not just from actors, writers and directors but from Left political parties and trade unions. Yet it has received relatively little attention in the pages of *Screen*. The only references I am able to trace are a translation into English of Goffredo Fofi's important historical-polemical article, published as long ago as 1972; a translation of a piece by Jean-Louis Comolli that deals with Renoir's *La Marseillaise* as an instance of 'the conjunction of the machine of Fiction and the machine of Representation', and Ginette Vincendeau's article on 'Community, Nostalgia

and the Spectacle of Masculinity – Jean Gabin', which reads Duvivier's *La Belle équipe* precisely not as a 'Popular Front film', but as a popular mainstream entertainment.² So prolonged a silence, at a time when the journal was enthusiastically engaging with the theoretical practice of progressive cinema, seems anomalous.

My first paragraph may hint at one possible explanation for it, in its foregrounding of dates and hence of history. *Screen* in its theoretical heyday followed Althusser in sternly eschewing historicity, which in practice often tended to mean marginalising history. The flight from reflectionism meant that while the work of a Godard, an Oshima, a Straub/Huillet could hardly be denied its historical dimension, that took second place to the texts' rigorous situating of their contradictory subject in some undefined cinematic here-and-now. This would have made it difficult for the journal to deal with the kind of heterodox, fluctuating, and heavily under-theorised movement that the films discussed by Buchsbaum represent.

A further reason is suggested by Buchsbaum's observations on the parallels between the first

¹ Jonathan Buchsbaum, *Cinéma Engagé: Film in the Popular Front*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p ix.

² Respectively, Goffredo Fofi, 'The Cinema of the Popular Front in France (1934-38)', reprinted in *Screen Reader 1*, London, SEFT, 1977, pp 172-224; Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Historical Fiction – A Body Too Much' (trans. Brewster), *Screen*, vol 19, no 2, Summer 1978, pp 41-53; Ginette Vincendeau, 'Community, Nostalgia and the Spectacle of Masculinity – Jean Gabin', *Screen*, vol 26 no 6, November/December 1985, pp 18-38.



La Vie est à nous (the country auction episode) (Jean Renoir et al, 1936)

Socialist term and the Popular Front.³ The political stance associated with *Screen* in the period under discussion was 'a largely superstructural Eurocommunism, which made accessible to a Western intellectual grouping the notion of cultural struggle'.⁴ Fofi's vehement denunciations on the 'compromise and manoeuvring, fear and treachery'⁵ that for him led to the Front's downfall (and were similarly at work in the Italian Communist party in 1966, when he was writing) would thus have been embarrassingly 'ultra-Leftist' for *Screen*'s later avatar, which implicitly endorsed a replication of the Popular Front strategy across Europe. This may have been precisely what made the films of the earlier period difficult to deal with so to speak head-on. They represented, after all, the failure as well as the success of that strategy, and Buchsbaum is not alone in seeing parallels between the France of Léon Blum and that of Mitterrand.

This institutional parapraxis (assuming I have diagnosed it correctly) means that *Cinéma Engagé* is an important work for *Screen* in particular as well as for film (or French) studies in general. Buchsbaum deals in some detail with twelve

films, among which only *La Marseillaise* and to a lesser extent *La Vie est à nous*, both signed by Renoir, are likely to be familiar to his readers. These are placed in their socio-political context, which is wider than might be imagined. The temptation to collapse all politically-funded and motivated film-making in 1930s France into a homogeneous 'Popular Front cinema', dominated by the Communist party, should be dispelled by Buchsbaum's study, which emphasises the film-making activity that went on under the aegis of the SFIO Socialist Party – in particular the contribution of the intriguing, and hitherto undervalued, extreme leftist Marceau Pivert. Extensive summaries and copious use of stills at once help to compensate and frustratingly whet the appetite for the unavailability of so many films. Germain Dulac, generally perceived as feminist/surrealist, appears in another light

³ Buchsbaum, op cit, p ix

⁴ Keith A Reader, 'The Intellectuals – notes towards a comparative study of their position in the social formations of France and Britain', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol 4, no 3, July 1982, pp 263-273

⁵ Fofi, op cit, p 206

again with Buchsbaum's account of *Le Retour à la vie*, an almost Keynesian plea for a rise in purchasing power to reflate the economy. Ciné-Liberté's *Grèves d'occupation* reminds us of how little footage of the 1968 factory occupations has ever been available here (Godard/Gorin's 'Brechtian' re-enactment in *Tout va bien*, exhilarating as it still is and ideologically sound as it once was, is precisely not documentary). The French Communist Party's *La Grande espérance*, on the other hand, shot at the 1937 congress and thus setting 'a reformist nationalism above the international proletarian revolution'⁶ sounds as though it would send shivers down many an erstwhile Eurocommunist spine.

As documentation, then, the work is invaluable, and its theoretical contribution is greater than might at first appear. This hinges largely on *La Vie est à nous*, the documentary Renoir directed for the Communist Party, which has received less than its share of serious attention because of its early banning and the 'relatively primitive stage'⁷ of French cinematic theory and criticism at the time. The first detailed analysis of the film (curiously never reproduced in *Screen* despite coming from a pedigree discursive stable) appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1970, and focuses on its '“dialecticization” of the modes of documentary and fiction'.⁸ Buchsbaum, despite some reservations about *Cahiers'* heavily theoretical discourse which are as much of their time as the said discourse is of its, is in broad agreement with their approach, and finds in *La Marseillaise* – intended as the jewel in the Popular Front's cultural crown, in fact its swansong – 'the

expression of the Popular Front emptied of any political relevance.'⁹

Much though I like the film, there is indeed precious little dialectic in *La Marseillaise*, and Buchsbaum's achievement is to have analysed the cinematic reasons for this rather than attributing it entirely to a determining political context – 'relative autonomy in action'. *La Marseillaise* may suggest a continuing political parallel with contemporary France not available when Buchsbaum was writing. In its implied stress on 'civil society', its republican values, its watering-down of earlier transforming zeal to a benign emphasis on social solidarity, might *La Marseillaise* not be seen as the first 'Rocardian' film?

Churlish in conclusion it may seem, but two errors need to be pointed out. One is that I have quite unjustifiably been credited with co-authorship of Ginette Vincendeau's article on Jean Gabin, in the otherwise excellent bibliography; the other is that Carné's *Quai des brumes* takes place in Le Havre, not in Marseille, where 'dawn mists hovering over the harbour'¹⁰ are probably a less common sight. Otherwise, *Cinéma Engagé* deserves high praise, and I hope will stimulate fresh interest in a still insufficiently-known area of cinematic history.

⁶ Buchsbaum, op cit, p 248

⁷ Buchsbaum, op cit, p 145

⁸ Buchsbaum, op cit, p 179

⁹ Buchsbaum, op cit, p 256

¹⁰ Buchsbaum, op cit, p 175

LITTLE SHOP GIRLS (AND OTHER WOMEN) GO TO THE MOVIES

CHARLOTTE BRUNSDON REVIEWS PATRICE PETRO'S 'JOYLESS STREETS: WOMEN AND MELODRAMATIC REPRESENTATION IN WEIMAR GERMANY'¹

The cinema of the Weimar republic has a very particular place in academe. The look of (some of) this cinema is so distinctive – and what happened next was so traumatic – that it has become a privileged site for a range of enquiries. Thus Kracauer's 1947 *From Caligari to Hitler*² inaugurates the study of Weimar cinema in a way which was to become characteristic, even across enormous methodological and disciplinary divides. Because after the Second World War it was impossible – and would perhaps have been improper – to view this cinema without memories of fascism, studies of Weimar cinema are always studies of something else – named explicitly by Kracauer, alluded to by Lotte Eisner in *The Haunted Screen* (*L'Ecran démoniaque* 1952/65)³, and engaged with differently by the wide range of writers in the combination of sociology and textual analysis-with-an-expressive-model that this cinema has attracted. The brevity of the period, the often rather rashly assumed unity of the product (Monaco and Huaco seem the worst offenders in this respect⁴), the spectacular story of the Weimar economy, and within that, the travails of the film industry and the subsequent well documented emigration of many key film-workers, have attracted sociologists and historians as well as Film and German Studies scholars to this cinema. And, repeatedly, these studies, implicitly or explicitly, address this cinema as in some way expressive –

of 'inner psychological dispositions', *Weltanschauung*, a nation's post-war trauma or the dilemmas of a particular class fraction. It is within these contexts, the academic search for a subject for the Weimar cinema, that we must place this ambitious and welcome book.

At its simplest, Petro manages to re-insert two terms missing from nearly all previous accounts of Weimar cinema – women and melodrama. I must immediately qualify this to say that it is women as spectators with which she is most concerned (most usefully also discussed by Miriam Hansen⁵), and in fact melodrama is present in earlier work, particularly Eisner's discussion of *Kammerspeilefilm*. However for Petro, as for two other important feminist

¹ Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989) 247 pp

² Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1947

³ Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*, translated by Roger Greaves, London, Thames and Hudson 1969. First published as *L'Ecran démoniaque*, Paris, Le Terrain vague, 1952, revised and re-issued 1965

⁴ Paul Monaco, *Cinema and Society: France and Germany during the Twenties*, New York, Oxford and Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1976
George Huaco, *The Sociology of Film Art*, New York, Basic Books, 1965

⁵ Miriam Hansen 'Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?' *New German Critique* no 29 Spring/Summer 1983, 147-84

scholars who have made extensive use of *The Melodramatic Imagination*⁶, Ien Ang and Christine Gledhill, melodrama is understood in what we might call the post-Brooks sense. In a way, then, Petro achieves very much what feminist research in other fields achieves, and indeed, by the same methods. That is, she addresses the already existing intellectual field but instead of just jumping in, pauses and pays attention to its formation. She asks questions which are informed by the way in which the field is already constituted, but which have a different emphasis. Sometimes these are the initial 'what about women?' questions that all feminist work started with, as in

What did the destabilization of male identity mean for female viewers in Weimar, especially given the perceived crisis in conventionally defined male and female gender roles? If traditional notions about gender were in crisis as a result of social, economic, and cultural changes, how did changing representations of sexual difference function for female viewers? (p17)

Here we see clearly the procedure, in which taken for granted ideas about the period are refocused to form the basis for new questions. Later in the book, Petro addresses the lack of symmetry in the terms man/woman, the way in which the 'what about women?' question is never sufficient, because woman is always there somewhere, but on different terms – meaningful for and to men and representations of masculine desire. Thus:

What kind of historical response to modernity is concealed in the textual and artistic inscription of woman in Weimar? And can we discern in this historical response a different discourse on subjectivity, perception, and sexual difference in Germany of the 1920s? In other words, is there a way to reread early discussions of modernity in Weimar so as to situate woman as an inhabitant of the city she so frequently serves to represent? (p 43)

And of course in posing these questions Petro lays bare the governing discourses of existing accounts. Women and melodrama cannot just be 're-inserted' – they take up too much room – they transform the field.

Petro intervenes, then, in three main areas.

First in the boy's story of irresolute, hesitating petit-bourgeois identifications which is the (main) extant account of Weimar cinema, whatever formal and narrative qualities are seen as most significant. This also involves an engagement with the connotational gendering of modernism, mass culture and the cinema in Weimar. Second, in the more recent debate within feminist film theory about the constitution – and pleasures of – the feminine spectator and the lures of melodrama. Finally, in the methodological issues raised by the attempt to specify an historical gendered address in a medium such as the cinema. In some ways this can be seen as the posing of specific historical questions about the relationship between film-textual and non-filmic material. I shall deal with these areas in reverse order.

Much of this book is taken up with a discussion of women's magazines and photojournalism of the period. The book has been well laid out, so that Petro's discussion of the many reproductions is usually adjacent to the relevant image, which is important, because she is making an argument about the contemporary addressee of these publications, 'the female reader', in which she is reliant on textual detail – sometimes the pose of a model, the repetition of a composition – which one needs to be able to check before assenting to the extrapolations she then makes about the crises and excitements of gendering in the period. Petro offers two main methodological justifications for her corpus and method. Although she quotes from Kracauer's preface, in which he lists 'popular magazines and broadcasts, bestsellers, ads, fashions in language and other sedimentary products of a people's cultural life' as capable of yielding information about 'predominant attitudes' and 'widespread inner tendencies', to prefer the cinema, which because of its 'inclusiveness' is more revelatory of 'psychological dispositions', it is mainly to reject his singular focus on the failed Oedipal drama of

⁶ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976 New York, Columbia University Press 1984; Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas*, translated by Della Couling from *Het Geval Dallas*, Amsterdam, Uitgeverij SUA, 1982, London, Methuen 1985; Christine Gledhill (ed) *Home is Where the Heart Is*, London, British Film Institute, 1987

the male (Weimar) subject. There are nevertheless certain affinities between Petro's combination of the analysis of cinema and illustrated magazines with Kracauer's notions of the revelatory powers of mass culture, although the stories she wishes to tell are much more fragmented, and she pays close attention to the cinematic, rather than narrative aspects of the films. This broadly described historical cultural studies approach would not necessarily specify illustrated magazines. This choice is justified by an interesting argument that in cinema and photojournalism of the period, we find privileged sites for the meeting of modernism and mass culture. In this 'space of negotiation' (p 34), the tension between modernist and mass cultural modes of production and reception, between avant-garde and realist textual strategies, is reinterpreted, she argues, in the use of melodramatic convention, a 'heightened and expressive representation of the implications of everyday life'. Thus Petro is arguing for a recognition of the cultural significance of the melodramatic mode within Weimar culture, and initially locates this mode within the address to female readers of the illustrated press. Asking feminist questions changes the stress of existing accounts at several different levels. A new mode of representation (the melodramatic) is elevated to the significance of the previously privileged fantastic. New members of the audience appear – women – who consume other mass cultural artefacts (magazines) as well as going to the cinema. And in these magazines there is repeated discussion of what it is to be a woman in Weimar Germany. The argument is that the well documented and repeated concern within the cinema with masculine gender identity can only be properly understood in the wider cultural context in which these same issues, but focusing on (new) femininity, were repeatedly addressed in periodicals aimed at women. The use of non-filmic material to illuminate discussion of cinema is thus justified on historical grounds, in that what may be seen as the predominantly modernist address to the male *spectator/reader* can only be properly understood in the specific context in which there was a parallel but dominantly melodramatic address to a female *reader/spectator*.

Petro's analysis of the illustrated press of the

period through notions of the melodramatic is convincing, and her account of the female reader constituted and addressed by this press allows her to give the first satisfying reading of the scene in *Die Büsche der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*, G W Pabst, 1928) when Lulu rushes in from court (her trial for murder), to turn on the bath and flick through a magazine (*Die Dame*) apparently without a care in the world. The implications of reading cinema through Brooks' notion of the melodramatic are perhaps broader than Petro suggests. In a specific historical inquiry, wider speculation would perhaps be inappropriate, but it would seem arguable that it is not just the Weimar cinema which has been dominantly constituted through discourses of realism and modernism, but that in Western cinema as a whole the founding melodramatic mode has been repudiated within criticism (ironically returning, or being recognised, when rendered virile through the analytic discourse, or re-read through modernism). Here, Petro's arguments are usefully thought with Christine Gledhill's historical and theoretical introduction to *Home is Where the Heart Is*⁷, which relies on research on 19th-century theatrical traditions as well as Brooks. Only in this longer perspective can we fully grasp the complexity of the existence of the cinema as simultaneously the last of the great 19th-century spectacular entertainments and *the* medium of modernity. Petro herself is very interesting (as is *New German Critique* no 40, and the collection edited by Anton Kaes⁸) on the discursive constitution of the cinema among Weimar intellectuals in the 1910s and 1920s and the flickering of associative meaning between cinema, the city and modernity. All terms haunted by feminine figures: little shop girls, whores, new women. And it is this haunting, and its metaphorical inscription in discourses of modernity and mass culture, which the book

⁷ Gledhill, op cit

⁸ *New German Critique* No 40 Special Issue on Weimar Film Theory, Winter 1987; Anton Kaes, 'The Debate about Cinema: Charting a Controversy (1909-1929)' translated by David J Levin from the introduction to *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909-29*, Tübingen, Max Niemayer Verlag, Munich, Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1978 in *New German Critique* 40, Winter 1987, 7-33

evokes so powerfully – the cinema reaching new audiences, women venturing into the public sphere for entertainment, women sitting engrossed before the screen – distracting men. She quotes from Wolfgang Schivelbusch's research on the railway journey in the 19th century, suggesting that the reader make substitutions so that the passage refers to women and the cinema:

*The lower classes (women), who really join the rank of travellers only after the advent of the railroad, are unencumbered by memories of previous forms of travel: thus the new forms are not so strange to them as they are to those classes that have to abandon their private coaches for the train.*⁹

This notion of the historicity of the perceptual apparatus, of the class and gender specificity of the perception and experience of cinema, is one of the main elements in Petro's intervention into debates about the constitution of the female spectator. Her interrogation of the psychoanalytic theorisation of the cinema spectator is grounded in an insistence on the historical, as well as textual, dimensions of spectatorship. She is concerned to establish the way in which sexual difference is inscribed in all the early formulations about the cinema and mass culture, and goes on to argue that current psychoanalytical paradigms are to a large extent homologous with these early formulations, all of which centre a male subject and masculine desire. This she does through an examination of the writings on modernity of Heidegger, Benjamin and Kracauer:

... because they align the cinema with a crisis of perception [in which the subject experiences becoming an object], their writings unwittingly reveal how the crisis of male vision is inseparable from the emergence of a mass cultural audience, and from the growing demands of women for an equal share in German cultural life. (p 50-51)

The argument about spectatorship, then, always aspires to be historical – even sociological – insisting that spectatorship cannot be deduced from the text.

In her final chapter, Petro mobilises her previous arguments to support an analysis of the address to the female spectator in the Weimar cinema. What is immediately arresting, if

predictable, is the way in which this argument changes the significant contours of Weimar cinema. Out go Louise Brooks and Marlene Dietrich, in come Asta Nielsen and Henny Porten. She deals only briefly with the fantastic, in a discussion of *Schatten* (*Warning Shadows* Arthur Robison 1923), before moving into substantial accounts of *Dirnentragödie* (*Tragedy of a Street* [UK] *Tragedy of a Whore* [US] Bruno Rahn 1927), *Hintertreppe* (*Backstairs* Leopold Jessner 1921), *Zuflucht* (*Refuge* Carl Froelich 1927) and *Die freudlose Gasse* (*The Joyless Street* GW Pabst 1925), arguing for their use of melodramatic codes and hence their appeal to female spectators. (Were one to wish to test out these readings in Britain, only *Hintertreppe* would be available, which is of course one of the problems of re-writing film history.) In arguing for the recognition of the melodramatic mode as an essential part of Weimar cinema, Petro also hypothesises about the rapt attention of the female viewer, and formulates the notion of the contemplative gaze:

The intensity of expression so characteristic of the Weimar melodrama therefore opens up a space for female subjectivity and desire, where the contemplative gaze is inseparable from an alternative conception of female spectatorship and visual pleasure. (p 158)

This I would have liked a little more of – particularly because, despite her own arguments about the historicity of spectatorship, Petro has to resort (as would we all) to supporting her analysis with her own textual exegeses. But they are powerful readings, and she brings the book to a fine climax in her isolation of a repeated image (in this instance from *Die freudlose Gasse*):

... the singular motif that allows us to understand the appeal of the film melodrama to female audiences in Weimar, to women previously positioned outside the gates of official culture: a female figure stands outside a locked or closed door and begins knocking, then pounding, as if to express the force of an ineffable desire and anger. That this singular gesture of frustration and defiance reappeared, almost unchanged, in various film

⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century*, trans. Anselm Hollo, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980, p 70. Quoted by Petro, p 77.



'Out go Louise Brooks and Marlene Dietrich, in come Asta Nielson and Henny Porten': Asta Nielson in the 1920s

melodramas of the 1920s, indicates that the contours of female subjectivity and desire were markedly different from those typically associated with the male subject in Weimar. (p 218)

Petro's achievement is partly to bring this female figure to the attention of the academy in a way that is both theoretically and historically demanding. There will doubtless be arguments –

but the productive and suggestive way in which the book engages with, for example, the formative work of Thomas Elsaesser and Mary Ann Doane suggests that these will point forward to new questions. Petro joins those scholars working to render more sophisticated and more historical our understanding of Weimar cinema so that there is no longer any question of one subject – or, indeed, one cinema.

HOLLYWOOD'S FAMILY ROMANCES

SUSAN BOYD-BOWMAN
REVIEWS ROBERT LANG'S 'AMERICAN
FILM MELODRAMA'

The historicising of film melodrama continues with Robert Lang's *American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli*¹ in which feminist work on melodrama is made to bed down with unabashed auteur criticism, in the service of Melodrama's reforming Mission.

Lang, who teaches film at Columbia University in New York, reveals in his preface that he toyed with the title *Hollywood's Family Romance* (or even . . . *Neurosis*), but realised that the Freudian allusion might be a hostage to fortune. Nevertheless, he confines himself to the *family* melodrama and remains within the problematic of gender difference: American film melodrama figures the contradictions within patriarchy; 'the Oedipal drama has been its chief represented object for more than eighty years'. Though he pays his debt to Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination*² (the fountainhead of much work on film melodrama), he discovered him late in his research (too late, perhaps) and despite his rehearsal of some British work on the history and aesthetics of melodrama, his theoretical position is on the Parisian psychoanalytic couch, particularly that of Deleuze and Guattari. Lang is *pour-Oedipe*. Even melodramas which are about couples are merely the first part of the fundamental 'mommy-daddy-me' story.

The thesis of the book has the virtue of being somewhat historical: the film melodrama between the 1910s and the 1960s shifted its discourse from the religious to the social to the psychoanalytic. But these categories are already blurred in the work of his three exemplary directors:

In the three Griffith films I have chosen for this study (Way Down East, The Mother and the

Law, and Broken Blossoms) the dominant melodramatic discourses are religious and social; in the three Vidor films (The Crowd, Stella Dallas, and Ruby Gentry) they are social and psychoanalytic; and in Minnelli's films (Madame Bovary, Some Came Running and Home from the Hill) the discourse is psychoanalytic, with a degree of irony that is generally absent in Vidor. (p7)

The villains in American melodrama may have altered, but they are all aspects of patriarchy, since at the centre of melodrama is the question of female subjectivity (despite the fact that some of his case studies do not feature a female protagonist, and some which do, like *Way Down East*, are basically male Oedipal fantasies). Taking his cue this time from Ann Douglas's *The Feminisation of American Culture*,³ he argues that the moral order of masculine monotheism has collapsed without being replaced by a feminine and modern religious sensibility.

Part one takes five chapters to lay out the theoretical apparatus, and Dr Lang is nothing if not catholic in his authorities: from Julia Kristeva to Eric Bentley; from Irigaray to Panofsky.

For example, a promising chapter on 'Tragedy, Melodrama and the Moral Occult' weaves standard literary criticism with Deleuze and Guattari on the parallels between psychoanalysis

¹ Robert Lang, *American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli*, Princeton University Press, 1989

² Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1976

³ Ann Douglas, *The Feminisation of American Culture*, New York, Avon Books, 1977

and melodrama. Melodrama, he concludes, came round to the tragic self-awareness of the role ideology plays in determining destiny. Robbe-Grillet is brought forward to testify to the fact that not only have we lost faith in tragedy, but in melodrama as well, resulting in the ironic mode of Sirk (and such late practitioners) which gets written off with a quote from Baudrillard about 'the characteristic hysteria of our times'. The following is a typical example of Lang's allusive and breathless writing:

Robbe-Grillet picks up where Existentialism left off, and it must be said that his is a lone voice now. The melodramatic imagination has survived because it provides a system, a way of understanding the world, even though the kind of irony and excess that dominates the address of the film and television melodrama can perhaps no longer so easily be called 'progressive'. (p18)

This is one of many places where Lang raises the once fashionable issue of 'progressiveness', and melodrama's ambivalent relation to the dominant ideology. In the chapter on 'Address', a lightning dash from Althusserian marxism to Metz results in the speculation that not only melodrama, but *all* film is now discursive to the film student who can no longer suspend disbelief in the *histoire*. Here, as elsewhere, Lang tips into the metadiscursive himself: the theories of spectatorship he sketches recapitulate, he maintains, the shift in melodrama itself, from the innocent to the ironic.

The first half of the book ends with vague reflections on the generic boundaries of melodrama: it must have *both* the 'perplexing repertoire of feeling' and the requisite style. 'Direction that takes for its guiding principle the stirring-up of emotion that resonates like latent dream content, is melodramatic, but will not necessarily result in a melodrama'. (p51) Melodramatic direction applied to melodramatic subject matter, however, will; and for Lang that means the American family.

The chapter on Griffith is by far the most successful. DW used to be nominated as the Father of American Cinema, and Lang's secondary purpose is to rehabilitate the patriarch. He has no trouble in demonstrating that Griffith's imagination was melodramatic ('nearly all pictures are good,' Griffith wrote, 'in that they

frequently show the triumph of good over evil') or that his style was a reflection of bourgeois society (Eisenstein's discussion of parallel montage as figuring the contrast between the haves and the have-nots), or that despite his Southern aristocratic background his politics were liberal ('the cinema camera is the agent of Democracy; it levels barriers between races and classes'). Griffith's films, argues Lang, encompass the change from Christian morality (the Squire in *Way Down East* is upright, and can right the wrong committed by the upper-class seducer, Sanderson) to the problematisation of class in *The Mother and the Law* (the contemporary urban segment of *Intolerance*, in which the factory owner and his fanatic sister are the villains) to that 'tragic dead end of Victorian American culture' (p 104)⁴, the demise of all three characters in *Broken Blossoms* (in the impasse produced by the text's obsession with difference).

'The post-Griffith melodrama confirmed that villainy was being cast in ideological terms' (p106), but Lang is hard-pressed to square his deterministic problematic with an auteurist approach which relies on implicit assumptions about agency and intent. He quotes Vidor as eschewing blaming the repression of his desiring protagonists on a villain of any class, but he reads the story of John and Mary Sims in *The Crowd* as an allegory of the effects of capitalism on the family, though one which stops short of attributing their misfortunes to it (as did, he claims, the subversive sequel *Our Daily Bread*).

It would be difficult to say anything new about Vidor's *Stella Dallas*, but Lang again uses Deleuze and Guattari to discuss how Stella is made to desire her own repression/oppression: 'Stella's sacrifice, read in terms of castration, suggests the overwhelming power of the Oedipal scenario, for it is only at the expense of desperate loss to herself that Stella is able to take her place within the symbolic order' (p136). Her 'incurable insufficiency of being' is not the lack of the material wealth that Stephen Dallas represents, but the gap between her life and what she sees on the screen, 'every moviegoer's problem'. Here, says Lang, as in Vidor's later *Ruby Gentry*, bourgeois ideology (the discourse of social class)

⁴ Ann Douglas, op cit, p 305



'The quintessentially melodramatic star': Jennifer Jones in *Ruby Gentry* (King Vidor, 1952)

is overlaid with Oedipus (the psychoanalytic discourse). Hollywood figures the former as the problems of the rich, and the latter as the problems of the sexy.

The chapter on Minnelli refracts much of the auteurist criticism of this director through the lens of Lang's Lacanianism: 'To find that space, somewhere between madness and authority, between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, between . . . "one kind of dream, and another kind of life" is the central passion of several Minnelli protagonists' (p171). He thus finds it easy to compare *Madame Bovary* with Dave Hirsch (of *Some Came Running*). Interestingly, he doesn't consider either the melodramas about artists and movie-makers, or the one in which psychiatry is explicitly dealt with (*The Cobweb*), and so a psychoanalytic discourse is attributed to Minnelli (the loss of faith in the Father) in the manner of cine-structuralism. Minnelli may theatricalise the banal or exploit the cliché, but his represented object is always an Oedipal drama – whether he knew it or not.

American Film Melodrama's juxtaposition of feminist theory and auteurist method is never resolved. Lang nowhere justifies his choice of directors or their films, or alludes to writers or studios (Jennifer Jones's highly wrought performances are cited as making her the quintessentially melodramatic star), or speculates about whether non-American melodrama shared Hollywood's obsession with the family. We simply infer that these three chaps had a more lucid understanding of the dialectic between class and sex than any other film-makers.

Lang writes less a conclusion than a reforming call for a critical theory of the family. 'The American cinema – the most powerful myth-making institution of our time – took Freud's family, lock stock and barrel, as its comprehensive Law' (p229). You might say the same about American film criticism, which in the hands of schizo-analysts like Lang claims a therapeutic role in curing us of this neurosis. The ending is American positivism: the last words are actually 'hope for a better future'.

THE ARCHEOLOGY OF FRENCH FILM THEORY AND CRITICISM

GINETTE VINCEDEAU REVIEWS RICHARD ABEL'S 'FRENCH FILM THEORY AND CRITICISM'

*French Film Theory and Criticism*¹ – *FFTC* for brevity – continues Richard Abel's major intervention in the field of pre-Second World War French cinema, started by his *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*. The two volumes of *FFTC* consist of a collection of (mostly short) texts translated from the French; some are reprinted from previous English-speaking anthologies or journals, the majority are original translations. The texts are arranged in chronological order, divided into period sections, each headed by a substantial introduction. Under the guiding light of Michel Foucault, Abel conceived his project as an 'archeology' of early French writings on film. His first motivation is to publish a large number of texts hitherto unavailable except to those who can read French and travel to Parisian libraries; his second, and more ambitious one, to begin a reassessment of French film theory and criticism up to 1939, as a body of work in its own right and in its influence on the better-known French theoreticians, from André Bazin onwards.

In its designated function as 'portable archive', *FFTC* constitutes an excellent research tool for scholars of French cinema but also, importantly, for those concerned with the development of film theory and criticism generally. Volume I in particular is testimony to the extraordinary wealth of intellectual activity generated by the cinema in France, and contains a body of texts which, as Abel points out, has been surprisingly neglected, compared to Soviet writings of the time. Some of the work contained in this volume is relatively familiar (texts by Louis Delluc,

Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein and Marcel L'Herbier, Ricciotto Canudo's reflections on the 'seventh art', debates around *photogénie* and *cinégraphie*), but some is less so (Henri Fescourt, Henri Diamant-Berger, Léon Moussinac), or indeed unknown, and the collection includes texts by writers not normally associated with the cinema – for instance the novelist and poet Jules Romains and his description (written in 1911) of early film spectatorship, both evocative of a lost era and astonishingly modern in its linking of film viewing and dream state: 'A bright circle abruptly illuminates the far wall. The whole room seems to sigh, "Ah!". And through the surprise simulated by this cry, they welcome the resurrection they were certain would come. The group dream now begins. They sleep; their eyes no longer see. They are no longer conscious of their bodies. Instead there are only passing images, a gliding and rustling of dream. They no longer realise they are in a large square chamber, immobile, in parallel rows as in a ploughed field.' (I, 53)

Volume II, on the 1930s, contains more reviews of individual films. It also extends the corpus of familiar names – Jean Renoir, Jean Vigo, Georges Sadoul, René Clair, etc – to major critics of the period who have so far remained untranslated, for instance the Communist Léon Moussinac – also in volume I – and the Italian-born Valéry Jahier who wrote excellent criticism

¹ Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism, A History/Anthology 1907-1939. Volume I: 1907-1929, Volume II: 1929-1939*. Princeton University Press, 1988

for the journal *Esprit*. Another bonus of volume II, in this respect, is the reproduction of reviews by the fascist François Vinneuil who, unfortunately in view of his abhorrent politics, was one of the most brilliant film critics of the 1930s. The full flavour of Vinneuil's witty and polemical style, full of puns, in-jokes and innuendos, doesn't quite come through, but this is no fault of the translation, which is reliable throughout (from spot checks over both volumes, my only queries would be stylistic points).

Alongside the pleasure and information value of reading the individual texts, *FFTC* allows readers to trace the early development of key debates in film studies: the grammar of film language, the search for a national style, the struggle for establishing the specificity of film as an art, narrative vs 'pure' cinema, realism – all these issues were hotly debated, and Abel's introductions provide a comprehensive industrial and cultural background to them. Particularly striking is the persistent concern over authorship, from Georges Méliès who asserted in 1906 that the filmmaker must be 'the author [scriptwriter], director, designer' (I, 19), to René Clair's early vision of the *auteur/metteur-en-scène* debate: 'People do not know "film authors", they know – when they are willing to – only directors, or *metteurs en scène*, a title which came from the theatre, as has everything harmful to the cinema' (II, 58), to the 1930s critics' desire to identify 'true' *cinéastes*: for example Valéry Jahier, who thinks Vigo is (on *L'Atalante* II, 186), or Roger Leenhardt, who thinks Julien Duvivier isn't (on *La Bandera*, II, 193/194).

As usual, Abel's scholarship is awe-inspiring in its thoroughness and accuracy, though the proliferation of footnotes – extremely useful as

they are – can make for laborious reading. But it would be perverse to complain about being given *too much* information since, as Abel says, 'we think we know and yet we actually do not know much about that cinema as a cultural practice' (II, xiii). My main criticism of *FFTC* lies elsewhere. First, I think Abel is too respectful of the canon. Volume II, for instance, produces much new material, as mentioned above, but still about the classics. Newly-translated reviews of Renoir's *La Bête humaine* or *La Marseillaise* are always worth reading, but I think that, given Abel's avowed aim to question the underlying assumptions of the film criticism of the period, it would be more revealing to look at what was written about some of the very popular films of the period which have not become part of the canon – say, Léon Poirier's *L'Appel du silence* or Maurice Tourneur's *Katia*. Second, I would have liked to see more account taken of the gender bias of French writing on film. Abel points out that most of the writers were bourgeois intellectuals, and painstakingly traces their political affiliations, yet fails to consider how gender also determined their positions, whether in the case of the exceptional women (Dulac's feminism is mentioned but not connected to her writing on film) or the vast majority of male critics, whether they belonged to the Right or the Left. For the latter, this would throw some interesting light, for instance, on their valorisation of realism and concurrent scorn for melodrama.

With those reservations, *FFTC* is an invaluable reference work (I have only mentioned in this review a fraction of the anthologised writers). It is excellently produced, though its price (\$49.50 for volume I and \$35.50 for volume II) will inevitably place it outside most individuals' reach.

RESPONSES TO COCO FUSCO'S 'FANTASIES OF OPPOSITIONALITY'

BY BÉRÉNICE REYNAUD AND
YVONNE RAINER

I Bérénice Reynaud writes:

WHEN PLANNING 'Sexism, Colonialism, Misrepresentation: A corrective Film Series and Conference', we were hoping to generate discussion and controversies – to challenge some of the preconceptions involved in the representation of sexual and racial difference in our audience and in ourselves. In France we say, 'to know something about a subject, write a book about it'. To explore a subject, curate a film event about it.

So, we welcomed the news that the series was going to be discussed in *Screen's* 'The Last "Special Issue" on Race?'¹, because it is within this context that we most hoped to continue a dialogue. The polemical form of Coco Fusco's *Fantasies of Oppositionality* came as a disappointment, but the issues she raises are the ones we wanted to discuss (and we would have been happy if she had brought them up *during* the event itself!). Indeed, we are taking her arguments so seriously that we are hereby extending to her an invitation to reprint a revised version of her article in the forthcoming catalogue of the conference.

Prior to this, a few points need to be discussed: some factual inaccuracies in her description, as well as her interpretation of our intentions and of what happened during the conference.

I

To start with, I will comment on the phrase: 'organised by French critic Bérénice Reynaud and white American independent filmmaker Yvonne Rainer.' It is an interesting slip to assume that my whiteness need not be specified since I am French. In the last twenty years, France has become a multiracial country, including a large minority of people of colour *who consider themselves French*. This identity does not preclude a problematic relationship both to current French politics, with its array of neo-

¹ *Screen*, Vol 29, no 4. Fusco's article was later reproduced in *Afterimage*, vol 16, no 5, December 1988, p 6

colonialism, discriminatory immigration policies and often violent racism, and to African nationalism. What it precludes, however, is the assumption that every French person is white.

It would be difficult, just from reading *Fantasies* . . . , to have a clear idea of the nature of the event. It was organised by two people working freelance, without any salaried organisational ties. The planning and fundraising took over a year and a half. The event took place under the aegis of the Collective for Living cinema, a 125-seat alternative film showcase, which is a not very well-endowed 'avant-garde organisation', and does not exactly qualify as being a part of the art establishment. Screenings took place at the Collective, but, in order not to overwork the staff, we presented some of the panels at another location. Dia Art Foundation donated the use of their auditorium for two of them.

Taking place from April 25 to May 8, 1988, the event included 35 screenings and three panel discussions. The total sum of money raised for the event (to cover such expenses as space rental to the Collective, film rental fees, speakers' fees, shipping, publicity, extra staff and organisers' fees) was under \$30,000.

Among the 40 films shown, there were 14 directed by white women: of these only four were from the United States (one with two shorts), one from Canada, one from Australia, three from England (including one Irish woman living in London), two from West Germany, one film made by a collective of Italian women. So, Fusco's statement that 'the majority of films were produced by white women from the First World' is not only statistically inaccurate, but it includes in the same category women living in different parts of the world, under different political regimes and economic situations and expressing different concerns. White identity (and, in particular, white femininity) has also to be problematised.

Also, it is not true that 'no works by white males were included'. (There was, however, no white male panelist.) We showed two works deconstructing the modes of appropriation of the image of the 'Other' by the Western mode of representation: *Here and Elsewhere* by Jean-Luc Godard, and *The White Castle* by Dutch documentarist Johann van der Keuken.

There were seven movies by black women (one Australian, one African and one French woman), and five films by black men (two African, two American and one British director). We also showed four movies directed by Asian women (one living in Australia, two in the US and one Filipino woman), and two films by Asian men (from the Philippines and Taiwan). There were three movies directed by Latina women (two from Mexico, one from Brazil), one from a (male) Nicaraguan film director, one by a Palestinian man, and one by an Israeli man. We did not, however, pick up movies to establish an exotic 'mix-and-match' of ethnicities, nationalities and persuasions, but we focused on these films because we were trying to articulate something that was essential to us as speaking and desiring subjects.

The list of films was also determined by what was available. There were films we tried very hard to get (Med Hondo's *West Indies* and Marisol Trujillo's *Prayer for Marilyn Monroe*, for example) but the only existing prints were tied up. Films directed by French-speaking women of colour (Saffi Faye, Assia Djebar) did not have English subtitles. We had been specifically asked by Coco Fusco not to show any film produced by the British collectives of black filmmakers, in order not to undercut the event 'Young, British and Black' which she had curated (and which took place, at least in part, at the Collective in June 1988).

I want to address the puzzling description of our curatorial activity as a 'fetishisation of the rare object' – a notion created by the economics of the art market. It assumes an unheard of fluidity in the film exhibition and distribution circuits and treats the 'rarity' of a film as if it were determined by a curatorial diktat. In reality, if some films are harder to see than others, there are objective (materialist) reasons for this. *Premiere* magazine recently asserted that the total gross of foreign movies in the US represented less than half of 1 per cent of the box-office for last year². Even if these figures do not include non-commercial screenings, the situation they describe is dismal. That such or such a film was recently shown in a Third World film festival or circuit does not warrant the assumption that it has received the audience (of white people and/or people of colour) it deserves. We experienced this at our expense: thinking that Julie Dash's *Illusions* had been shown often enough, we programmed it only once, thus frustrating a number of our spectators (including people of colour) who had never seen it. Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* had not been shown theatrically in the US in years, except for a couple of screenings as part of a 'New Yorker Retrospective' in 1987. We also had a few New York premières (Tracy Moffatt's *Nice Colored Girls*, Sarah Maldoror's *Aimé Césaire* and Flora M'Mbubu-Schelling's *Kumekucha*). We had to turn detective to track down prints of films whose English-subtitled versions were considered lost (Djibril Diop-Mambety's *Touki Bouki*, Marilu Diaz-Abaya's *Moral* and Eddie Romero's *As We Were*); we even showed Matilde Landeta's *La Negra Angustias* in Spanish without subtitles³.

Contrary to what happens in the art market, a 'rare' film is a film of lesser commercial value: made in makeshift conditions, produced by smaller companies that often dissolve after the film is completed, taken on by distributors who lack the means to pay for subtitling and publicity, it does not circulate well, and is often the victim of a *de facto* economic censorship. Moreover, the growing deterioration of the terms of exchange, as noted in the area of international trade (where First World countries tend to exchange more goods, currencies and services among themselves than with Third World countries) also affects the international circulation of films. In spite of such events as the 1988 Retrospective of African Cinema at the Washington Film Festival, it is usually more difficult to see African movies in the US than in France or Britain (which maintain privileged 'cultural links' with their former

² Rob Medich, 'Why Foreign Films Founder', *Premiere*, December 1988, p 30

³ Until the homage paid to her by La Havana Film Festival 1987, Matilde Landeta's work had more or less fallen into oblivion. See also Carmen Huaco-Nuzum's article on Landeta, *Screen*, vol 28, no 4, Autumn 1987



Sambizanga (Sarah Maldoror, 1932)

colonies; also a number of French and British citizens who are of direct African descent make 'African movies' while living in the 'metropolis'. Festivals of Black cinema (such as 'Black Light' in Chicago and CBC in Boston), or Black film distribution companies (such as Mypheduh in Washington DC) have dealt with African movies – but still without the financial means that would allow Wallof, Zulu, Portugese or French-speaking movies to be shown to American audiences.

An important question is whether African movies should be confined to all-black audiences in the US, one more complex if you consider that African-Americans and Africans from Africa do not automatically think that their plight, their concerns, their aesthetics have much in common. The panafricanism of some theoreticians (Teshome Gabriel, Clyde Taylor) is criticised by others who think that Black American cinema, having its own history and aesthetics, is not comparable to African cinema. Who then, in the absence of an African community (such as exist in France or Britain), should be looking at African movies in the US? The identification of a 'black spectator' is at least as problematic as the concept of a 'white spectatorship', and raises the complex issues of what it means to be black, and how to posit oneself in relation to this identity. I find it impossible to advance a theory of the spectator based on a one-sided opposition between an 'essential black' and an 'essential white' spectator, instead of focusing on the historical, sociological and political complexities of specific situations. It is, somehow, the trap into which Jane Gaines falls when she opposed 'white feminists' and 'black feminists' in her otherwise insightful article 'White Privilege and Look-

⁴ *Screen*, vol 29, no 4, p 12-27. In the catalogue essay accompanying the retrospective of the work of black women filmmakers we curated for March 1989 Créteil International Women's Film Festival, June Giovanni and I tried to address this issue

ing Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory.’⁴ In their introduction to the same *Screen* issue, Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, by quoting Stuart Hall, further open the discussion: ‘Once you enter the politics of the end of the essential black subject you . . . can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject.’⁵

Another problem is raised by the ‘ghettoisation’ of Asian movies within the Filipino, Chinese and Japanese communities of the US. A great number of films exist only as videocassettes, without subtitles⁶, outside of the normal circuits of distribution and exhibition, mostly out of the reach of a ‘regular audience’ (and let’s stop pretending that we are talking only of a well-meaning-but-ignorant Caucasian audience: under the current system of exhibition/distribution, a black spectator has no better access to Filipino or Chinese movies than a white spectator⁷). The problem is this: there *are* terrific movies out there, movies that challenge our conceptions of what cinema is, what a plot, a character, femininity, or alienation is, movies with different points of view from those we share and/or have been exposed to, movies that may inform us about the lives and thoughts of their makers. But how do we get to see them? How can we show them? The Collective cannot pretend to reach a ‘mass’ audience, but aiming at a racially mixed public for the series was a way of showing these (rare) movies to as many people as possible: African movies to Asian, Black and Caucasian spectators, etc. Hong Kong critic Evans Chan noted as a positive fact that it was during ‘Sexism, Colonialism, Misrepresentation’ that Edward Yang’s *Taipei Story* was, for the first time, shown in New York outside of a purely Asian context.⁸ Explaining that it was also through our series that he discovered Laleen Jayamanne’s *Song of Ceylon* (i.e. an experimental film by an Asian woman), Daryl Chin summarises the situation: ‘How is a movie like this going to get seen? The forums for foreign films favor traditional narrative films, and there is bias in organisations dealing with Asian culture for the traditional as well.’⁹ The question is: who are these images designed for? Discussions around the absence of people of colour in dominant cinema have emphasised the need for spectators of colour to *see their own images* on the silver screen, and it was the main argument of Bell Hook’s paper in the series’s second panel.¹⁰ However, is it enough for a movie to provide a more flattering – or simply more realistic – mirror image to the people it represents? The interest of a film like Chris Choy’s and Renee Tajima’s *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (and its potential as a ‘crossover’) is that, while presenting positive images of the Asian community, it also addresses white audiences by challenging their racist pre-conceptions, their violence. It does so by turning the tables: it is not so much the life of a Chinese-American family that is submitted to scrutiny, as the ideology, mores and culture of white blue-collar workers that are dissected. In *Vincent Chin*, ‘the Other is the white male.’¹¹ So the effect of the film will not be the same on Asian and white audiences,

⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘New Ethnicities’, in Kobena Mercer (ed), *Black Film/British Cinema*, ICA Document 7/ British Film Institute Production Special, 1988, quoted in *Screen*, vol 29, no 4, p 5

⁶ Chinese movies are an exception: because of the number of Chinese languages movies produced in Hong Kong (in Cantonese) or in Taiwan (in Mandarin, and, more recently, in Taiwanese) are subtitled not only in Chinese, but also in English, to be understood throughout the Chinese diaspora. On the other hand, films produced in the People’s Republic of China are not subtitled in English, except those that are marked for exportation (usually ‘art movies’ picked up by international festivals). However, people interested in Hong Kong or Taiwan cinema are faced with an additional difficulty: most publicity material (posters etc) are in Chinese, and Chinatown theatres do not advertise in English-speaking newspapers

⁷ Although in an interview conducted in October 1987 (and partly reproduced in the December 1988 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, p 32), John Yueng, manager of the Rosemary Theatre in New York’s Chinatown, told me that ‘martial arts’ movies were very popular in the black

community who sometimes filled most of his theatre. I am still trying to analyse the connection between the development of martial arts as a cinematic genre in Asian countries and feelings of powerlessness in relation to the Western world – as was suggested to me by Taiwanese critics – which could explain its popularity in the black community: the martial artist is an all-powerful man of colour!

since it somehow 'recentres' the former and 'decentres' the latter – which is why it should be shown to both.

II

At a socio-political level, the crux of the matter lies in what Fusco describes as 'the segregated division of labour in which ... white art institutions provide structures of control in which white intellectuals theorise about racism while ethnic film and video producers supply "experiential" material in the form of testimony and documentary, or in which the white intelligentsia solicits token Third World intellectuals to theorise about the question – the problem of the "other" – for the white intelligentsia.' I will divide the issues involved in this formulation: first, the role of white versus Third World intellectuals; second, the question of the audience; third, the problem of the 'other'.

I understand how Coco Fusco and other intellectuals of colour may fear that the showing of film and video works produced by people of colour in white-operated institutions might result in weakening community-based showcases and in the long term deprive them of their means of existence, audience support and funding resources. This is a quite legitimate concern¹², and the problem is particularly acute at a time of reduction of the funding resources for non-profit film and video showcases, which end up competing for the same dollars. The 'culprit', however, may not be the small, white, non-profit organisation which shows Third World movies, but a state of things that creates such competition among grant recipients. I suggest, furthermore, that the racial tensions we are witnessing are the direct result of that paucity of resources, of the state of humiliating financial dependency and/or poverty experienced by small, non-profit art organisations, rather than some intrinsic 'bad will' on the part of either whites or people of colour. These pressures are in accord with well-known sociological laws. To cite an example I know particularly well (although similar situations exist in the US), in the multiracial town where I was born, Marseille, racial tensions are most acute between white and Arabic dwellers living on welfare in government-sponsored projects. I believe that, as white intellectuals and intellectuals of colour, we have the responsibility not to fall into the 'divide-and-dominate' trap laid by the various powers in place, but rather to analyse the tensions we are currently experiencing as generated by the paucity of resources in the art world and not as the result of some essential 'clash' between segments of the white and non-white communities.

Now to go on to the second part of my argument, I grew up in a world – France after the decolonisation of North and Black Africa – where racism was presented to us as 'the problem of the others [Arabs, Blacks]'

⁸ Evans Chan, conversation with Taiwanese critic Vivian Huang and the author, October 1988

⁹ Daryl Chin, 'Writing an Unexpurgated History of Asian American Film', *CineVue*, Asian CineVision, New York, vol III, no 7, June 1988

¹⁰ 'What do you remember about Sapphire? She was not us. THE FIRST SCREEN IMAGE OF A BLACK WOMAN I SAW. We did not long to be there. We did not long for her. We did not want our construction to be this hated black female thingfoil, backdrop, her black female image was not the body of desire. There was nothing to see. She was not us ...' (Bell Hook's paper will be published in the forthcoming catalogue of the series 'Sexism, Colonialism, Misrepresentation.') The issue of *Screen* in which *Fantasies* ... originally appeared

something that victimised 'them' but did not concern 'us'. The best part of my political, intellectual and human education consisted in coming to understand how much racism was 'our' problem as well. Not because 'we' are such good-natured, well-meaning, politically correct Liberals. No. Racism is 'our' problem not as 'Liberals' but as whites, because we are its victims as well. Not that our plight is in any way comparable to that of people of colour, but racism is a *structure* that affects us all, perpetrators and victims, and Liberals caught in the middle. It does not give us the right to speak for the victims of racism, but the duty to examine our own connections with racism. Racism has made white people blind, deaf and stupid, and incapable of keeping in mind more than their short-term interests. Racism made them think it was OK to pillage entire continents or drop an atom bomb on yellow-skinned people – that violations of civil rights are less 'serious' if committed on Algerian Freedom Fighters or Nicaraguan peasants than on white-skinned Poles or Russians. Racism has made them forget that they could not perform, or condone, or 'pretend not to see' acts that were morally despicable without becoming morally despicable and running the risk of having the same acts perpetrated on themselves. The first liberated slaves to write about their lives, from Frederick Douglass to Mary Prince or 'Linda Brent', while telling harrowing stories of physical or sexual abuse, exhausting work and murder, insisted on the damaging effects slavery had on white society. Similarly, Berthold Brecht analysed in some of his plays how anti-semitism was literally destroying Germany. How could I not be concerned?

Since we were accused of not putting into perspective 'whiteness' as an ethnic category, let me speak of the plight of the non-racist white intellectual. While it is politically acceptable for the black intellectual to make a choice between various forms of separatism and integration, the white intellectual has a much narrower margin of action. To express it humorously, the black intellectual can say 'Let's go back to Africa!' or 'I will only show my films in black institutions'¹³ – but the white intellectual cannot send anybody back anywhere or forbid anybody to show anything anywhere without – well, being a racist. Serves him/her right. His/her ancestors, political leaders, society are responsible for the black diaspora, the continuing displacement of people of colour throughout the world, the continuous pillage of the Third World, so it is within his/her own surroundings, political system, society that the white intellectual has to find a solution for the mess thus created. Meaning that he/she has to fight for a solution of *cohabitation*, if not of integration. Meaning that he/she *has* to establish a dialogue with people of colour. And get smacked on the bottom once in a while in the process (as Fusco's article proves), but after all, isn't this the *raison d'être* of the white intellectual? Kidding aside, if I (meaning a French white person) am going (as I hope) to have a *real* dialogue with people of colour, it cannot be a one-way street. I want to acknowledge and understand as much as I can the position of the persons to whom I am speaking, but I have a

contains articles that put into a critical perspective the notion of the identification of the black spectator with (the lack of) his/her image on the screen, in particular Manthia Diawara's 'Black Spectatorship – Problems of Identification and Resistance.' (*Screen*, op cit, p66-76)

¹¹ Renee Tajima, telephone conversation with the author during the planning of the conference

¹² See for example the selection of Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Daughter of the Nile* at the 1988 New York Film Festival, which caused the distributor to withdraw it from the festival organised by Asian CineVision

¹³ This is only a *theoretical* possibility. Isaac Julien pointed out to me that black people living in Europe and/or the US do not have the *real* possibility of 'going back to Africa'. I am also grateful to Paris-born filmmaker Willie Rameau for having brought to my attention the notion of 'negropolitains', black children of West Indian or African parents 'who were born or brought up in France but didn't choose to', an important element of contemporary black diaspora

right to have the particular difficulties of my own position acknowledged and understood. Maybe some people of colour do not want to talk to me. It is because they *do not need me the way I need them*. The damage done to the whites by racism results in the fact that they no longer have any identity without a dialogue with people of colour. (Which is what I was struggling to express during the conference when I was attacked for having described Bell Hooks as a 'black American writer' while I had not specified that the other panelists, say, Martha Gever and Joan Copjec, were 'white Americans'. I understood the term 'black American writer' to be a source of pride, while I did not find it was the case with 'being white'. Besides, in the history of American literature, being a 'black-American writer' implies a certain political position, while being a 'white writer' implies none – unless the writer is defined as a 'white supremacist'!)

The question of the audience is practical as well as theoretical. Even though its audience is small, the Collective for Living Cinema has proven capable, with certain programmes (Puerto-Rican or Filipino movies, Third World Newsreel retrospective, early black cinema, etc), of attracting a public of colour. It is true that they do not routinely frequent the Collective, but we took it as a challenge to prove that an institution can change, and that it was possible to give a more 'multicultural' orientation to its programmes. We conceived our series as one of the events contributing to the new make-up of the institution –and not a '*single event* [to] overcome decades of racism and sexism!'

In her essay, Yvonne Rainer mentions our failure to collaborate actively with programmers of colour. This was partly due to a lack of know-how, a non-history of collaboration, partly to the paucity of the monies raised. While it was OK for us to work for practically nothing, it seemed impossible to ask a collaborator of colour to do the same. 'The great white guilt' was raising its ugly head. In spite of our failure to reach a better collaboration with Third World institutions, we did, however, receive crucial help. We were given access to the mailing lists of Third World Newsreel, as well as of Women Make Movies. Through Catherine Benamou we received active support, in terms of programming and publicity, from Asian intellectuals and community members. We couldn't afford to hire Carmen Ashhurst as a publicist as we would have liked, but she gave us access to her mailing list and advice on how to try and reach the black community. We contacted the Asian, black and Latino press, placed ads in their papers and invited their critics (most of them came, except for the Latino press). The number of people of colour that came to the screenings was far greater than what we usually see at the Collective: when black or African movies were shown, about half of the audience was black. We didn't have a 'white audience' in mind when we planned the series, but a racially mixed audience, and I think that, in most cases, this is the audience that came.

We argued, Yvonne and I, about the composition of programmes

which might best produce this result. The programme that best reflects our original intentions showed in sequence Julie Dash's *Illusions*, Leslie Thornton's *Adynata* and Su Friedrich's *Damned If You Don't*: three very different movies, each in its own way deconstructing 'femininity' in relation to: the discourse of racial oppression, seen from the point of view of a black woman; the alienating construction of a mysterious 'otherness', seen from the point of view of a white, Anglo-Saxon woman; and the discourse of sexual oppression, seen from the point of view of a white, Catholic, lesbian woman. Through such a juxtaposition we were trying to see if it was possible to compare, or at least to talk about these different types of alienation.

However, to fulfil the expectations created in specific audiences, I insisted on giving most of the programmes a certain political and ethnic homogeneity, and on showing, for example, *Nice Colored Girls* with *Emitai*, and *Two Dollars and a Dream* with *Burning an Illusion*.

The biggest failure that we registered was justly pointed out by Bell Hooks when she noticed how few black women were in the audience of the second panel: *The Visual Construction of Sexual Difference*. We discussed this at length with other participants of the conference, in particular with Michele Wallace who suggested that the title of the panel was probably responsible for the situation. In organising the panel, I had misjudged two elements: the alienation felt by many black women when topics of 'feminist film theory' are discussed; and the academic institutionalisation of feminist film theory. My goal in constructing this panel was Utopian – trying to generate dialogue between a German professor/critic/editor influenced by the Frankfurt school (Gertrud Koch), a Yale professor known for her work on black women and feminism (Bell Hooks), a film scholar influenced by Lacanian film theory (Joan Copjec), a specialist of Latin American and Filipino cinema (Catherine Benamou), and a writer/editor representing the point of view of the lesbian community (Martha Gever). I was also trying to deal with some of the problems I have with the 'field' of academic feminist film theory in the US – namely its apoliticism and ahistoricity, and an interpretation and use of psychoanalytic theory with which I often disagree.¹⁴ For example, I generally do not use (and never in writing) the term *patriarchy*, which I find devoid of scientific meaning (you can't find it in Marx – even if it appears in the late Engels – and certainly not in Althusser, Freud or Lacan), and, in addition, politically suspect. I was hoping that the confrontation of such different points of view would provoke a fruitful exchange, and enrich the field. The discussion, however, turned out to be typically 'Americanocentrist': few people registered the interesting contributions made by Gertrud Koch, whose positions on feminist film theory are radically different from what is usually meant by this term in English-speaking countries. It was also 'heterocentrist' in so far as Martha Gever's paper on the representation of lesbians in cinema was not discussed. I am quite happy that these issues were raised – even in a confrontational manner – because it turned a lot of

¹⁴ My disagreement is mostly with the first, now classical, texts of Anglo-Saxon feminist theory, and not with the more contemporary – and more historically grounded – research of scholars like Mary Anne Doane or Joan Copjec. In the introduction to the paper she delivered at the conference, Joan specifically addressed 'the most serious charge brought against psychoanalysis (. . .); it is culturally and historically indifferent – universalising, in short'. (Joan Copjec's paper is also to be published in the forthcoming *Catalogue* of the Conference.)

¹⁵ Bell Hooks, *Talking Back - Thinking Feminist - Thinking Black*, Boston, South End Press, 1989, p 179. My italics

¹⁶ This point was underlined by Trinh T Minh-ha in the paper she delivered at the Conference: 'Whether *Third World* sounds negative or positive also depends on *who* uses it or in what context it is used. The question of difference is always at work. In many Euro-American contexts, I am deliberately Third World. In Africa, I am often Asian. When I go to China and read what Beijing writes about Hanoi in newspapers, then I am very Vietnamese. In Vietnam, I am, no doubt, wo-man' (to be published in the *Catalogue*)

people's thoughts (including mine) in what I believe is the right direction. In her latest book, Bell Hooks underlines some of the mistrust experienced by black women in relation to feminism and offers a complex analysis of this situation: 'At times, the insistence that feminism is really "a white female thing that has nothing to do with black women" masks black female rage towards white women, a rage rooted in the historical servant-served relationship where white women have used power to dominate, exploit, and oppress . . . This resistance to white female domination must be separated from a black female refusal to bond with white women engaged in feminist struggle. This refusal is often *rooted as well in traditional sexist models*: women learn to see one another as enemies, as threats, as competitors.'¹⁵

To talk about 'the other', let it be said that Yvonne and I have a different perspective which we will not try to reconcile. I am white, but I am female, I am non-American, I am also half-Jewish born in an anti-semitic country: three different ways of experiencing 'otherness'. It would be foolish to dismiss my whiteness as an insignificant category on the grounds of all my 'otherness'. No. As a white person, I speak from the centre. As a woman, and, depending on the contexts, as a half-Jew and non-American, I speak from the margin. I do not think, however, that anybody can decide if I am more privileged as a white person than alienated as a woman or a Jew. Not that I haven't made any choices. Making political commitments in anti-colonialist or feminist movements, or reclaiming one's Jewish identity instead of 'passing' implies certain positions concerning one's whiteness, one's femininity, one's ethnic identity, even though these positions do not provide one with a secure identity. Anti-colonialist struggle uncovers the burden of white responsibility in the oppression of the Third World, feminism makes one more acutely aware of the contradictions of femininity without necessarily providing solutions, etc. The point is to articulate the place where one is speaking from, to make the dialectical connections between one's contradictory identities (as a white person and as a woman, for example) – then to see how one's otherness is connected with different forms of otherness. Not that they are similar, or even comparable. There are many ways to be posited in the margin of the master discourse, of the discourse of power, many ways of partaking in it and being rejected by it.¹⁶ I do not believe in a hypothetical solidarity of victims, but I believe in the reality of power.

Fantasies . . . asserts that 'the constitution of the "other" around an absent centre reaffirms that centre . . . it confirms the central role of those avant-garde institutions and the individuals who act as intermediaries in the current arts scene,' and this is where one of our major differences lies. Fusco implies that, because we are white, we are constructing people of colour as 'others'. I am arguing that, as women, we feel constructed as others. Because we talk of 'the other', Fusco

assumes that we are positing ourselves as an unspoken centre that we refuse to discuss. Because we felt constructed as 'others' by a power that escapes us, we wanted to discuss and possibly analyse a fuller spectrum of the situations of alienation created by this power. This later point also comes from personal experience: the racist people I have known have also been sexist, and I have met a number of white oppressed women pathetically espousing the racist points of view of their fathers or husbands in a desperate effort to *fit* within a dominant language that rejected them and made them inferior beings¹⁷; so I feel that these two forms of oppression – no matter how different – are structured from the same core of power.

The last part of Fusco's argument ('power, veiled and silent, remains in place') is also the most important, and I am sorry that she confuses, in the same breath, 'the centre' and 'the avant-garde institutions'. With regard to the avant-garde, Yvonne's response is superb and I will only add that a large part of my work as a critic has consisted in deconstructing the canons of the traditional 'white male avant-garde'. The main point of Fusco's argument is that 'the constitution of the other around an absent centre reaffirms this centre', but this is where my interpretation diverges from hers. This operation is not what causes power to remain invisible. Power, to start with, *is* invisible, and remains so as long as it is not put into question. The notion of 'otherness' assigns a locus to power, and thus relativises it. It does not make it more or less visible, it assigns it a place within language, and thus allows 'the others' to speak about it. Power is thus experienced as what is not us – and power can only be identified as such if we accept that 'we' are 'the others'. Fascism and racism start when disempowered groups of people identify with the power in place, imagine they are the centre and that it gives them the right to do whatever they want to people who are different from themselves. So the first step is to see in which way we are powerless, in which way we are in the margin. The point is not to decide which categories of people are *more* in the margin, but the specificity of our alienations. When preparing the series, I was influenced by Trinh T Minh-ha's writing, especially her use of the concept of 'otherness', which implies that 'the master is made to recognise that His Culture is not as homogeneous, not as monolithic as He once believed it to be; He discovers . . . that He is just an other among others'.¹⁸ This definition constructs 'otherness' in its relation to various instances of power and powerlessness, and is non-exclusive. Thus used, the concept of 'otherness' defines a *structure* of relation to power, instead of excluding some categories of people from the master discourse.

The second step is, as Bell Hooks justly describes, to find in which way we partake of power, how 'women can and do participate in politics of domination, that we dominate, that we are dominated'.¹⁹ The third step, the most difficult for a white liberal, is to recognise the process through which one has already become a figure of oppression. Mary

¹⁷ I don't have room to develop this point, but it is one of the most important tools of the ruling ideology to alienate those it dominates to the point of making them identify with its point of view. A whole new area of research could be open – at the juncture of racist and sexist alienation – if the racism of some *white women* could be analysed in relation to the material and ideological form of oppression they otherwise undergo

¹⁸ 'Introduction', Discourse # 8 ('The Inappropriated Other'), Fall/Winter 86-87, p 3

¹⁹ Bell Hooks, op cit p 20.

²⁰ Mary Ellen Washington, 'Introduction', in *Black-Eyed Susans – Classic Stories by and about Black Women*, New York, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975. See in particular the section 'The Black Woman and the Myth of the White Woman', which contains a short story by Louise Meriwether, 'A Happening in Barbados'

²¹ This is also one of my major disagreements with some of the most established British or American feminist theories

²² What is understood in English-speaking countries as 'French-inspired feminism' has no equivalent in France. One of the most shocking aspects of French academic life is the total absence of feminist film theory. See Ginette Vincendeau's article 'Women's cinema, Film Theory and Feminism in France', *Screen* vol 28, no 4, Autumn 1987

Ellen Washington sensitively describes how history weighs heavily on the relationship between white women and black women.²⁰ The awkwardness, or the tension, which sometimes exists does not always depend on the personality, the actions, the 'goodwill' or 'political correctness' of the two women facing each other—but on a political unconscious, a collective memory resulting from the position of power historically held by white women over black women. Our inability to secure a working relationship with a woman of colour might have to be analysed in this light, and one of the fringe benefits of having worked on the series was the necessity of re-thinking this issue. Not only did I have to reconsider my position as a white liberal woman, but the contacts I made with people of colour and the things I learned from them have affected my current work as a critic and programmer.

III

An important objection against the series comes from the assumption that we were trying to equate sexist and colonialist oppression—as if a mere comma in a title had such a formidable power. To complete what Yvonne says, I will add what I have on numerous occasions expressed about such equations. For example, I believe that the efforts to 'reconcile' marxism and psychoanalysis are uncalled for, since these two disciplines operate at very different levels—and thus do not have the same object²¹. My understanding of our *episteme* (to borrow Foucault's concept), whether you call it post-modern or not, is that of a fractured body of contradictory knowledges, half-knowledges, false knowledges, beliefs, ideologies and illusions whose fields partially overlap but never coincide. The basis of *any* theoretical investigation is the delimitation of a specific field, object, and method, and, from this point of view, the *object* of racism is not the same as that of sexism. In the multi-faceted reality presented by our social body, however, they overlap, and what is interesting is to work at the *articulations* of these different fields of enquiry, and to produce a critical theory from the study of such articulations, which may be extremely complex. To deal with the issue, we selected three specific 'angles'. One of the things that puzzles me in *Fantasies* . . . is that, while we are accused of lumping together sexism and colonialism, we are also accused of not dealing with *all* of the issues on *every* panel. In so far as the accusation of 'Eurocentric presumption that sexual difference could be separated from other differences' and of having 'the organizing principles of the discussion . . . drawn from [largely French] feminist psychoanalysis'²² seems to be directed towards me, I have to state the following: It was a matter of method to have three different panels, each dealing with a different topic (and to have only five speakers on each panel, so that each one had time to speak), but, since they were part of the same event, we were hoping the audience would see connection between the three. Out of fifteen speakers, only

one (Joan Copjec) has a direct connection with French (Lacanian) psychoanalysis. The titles of the panels were deliberately provocative. The first one, *Exclusionary Practices: Political Expediency and/or Social Necessity*, were *designed* to provoke the reaction described by Fusco (Linda Mabalot and Isaac Julien pointing out 'that it was exclusion from white institutions that led to their opting for ethnically and/or racially based organisations'.) It is unfair to attack the composition of this specific panel for not containing representatives of white excluding organisations: the focus was on the strategy and politics of creating organisations specific to under-represented segments of the population.

One thing not discussed by Fusco: we did not feature ourselves as speakers on the panels (and I decided not to show any movies by white French women). We had a reason for this, which motivated our entire effort: we wanted not to speak *for*, not to speak *about*—not even to speak *with*—but to listen to, or rather, to listen *with*. In the light of this and the above explanations, we hope to continue the dialogue.

II Yvonne Rainer writes:

To the Editor:

In response to Coco Fusco's 'Fantasies of Oppositionality'¹, I would prefer to address her personally, thus (hopefully) changing the tone of querulous detachment that so often pervades letters-to-the-editor to one of more conversational—albeit confrontational—disagreement. Perhaps a questionable distinction but, nevertheless, allow me to begin again:

Dear Coco:

Thanks for your essay. In response I shall try not to be defensive, or apologetic, or disingenuous, or evasive, or antagonistic, or simplistic, or unfair. First off, I have a confession to make about an aspect of my fantasy life that resurfaced in response to your elaborations on 'fantasies of oppositionality'. With Hedda Nussbaum's battered face in the news every day, I am acutely reminded of how historical and social/familial forces converge to saddle women with the self-image and 'destiny' of victim. Those of us who escape or transcend the destiny often retain the scars and residue of the self-image. For middle-class white women on the political Left this can take the form of an identification with victims. In my case (and I am surely not the first to voice this) at some point a peculiar transposition in relation to non-white others took place at the level of fantasy. The Other as fellow victim became more noble than I.

And who were these nobler victims? Starting with the most victimised

¹ *Screen*, vol 29, no 4,
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(alas, even the most noble fantasy of solidarity has its pecking order), they were: blacks, Lesbians, Latina women, Asians and gay men. Somehow Latino men got lost in the shuffle. I've taken the liberty of exposing this eccentric—and somewhat embarrassing—topography 'in order to contextualise it as a kind of overcompensation by an 'enlightened', or politically Left, member of a privileged class. The ambivalence that white middle-class progressives may have toward their own privilege, coupled with the desire to avoid being identified with their dominant class or race, can result in either a disavowal or a skewed sense of social difference.

What I'm getting to is how my stage had been set for your 'fantasies of oppositionality', which, at the proper moment, right on cue, sailed in from the wings with the Utopian imperative: 'We white women and people of colour will unite and resist the forces that oppress us.' As unmediated fantasy it invokes the old 'family of man' chestnut, dusted off and adjusted for 'corrective' inclusions, with its assumption of shared experience that ignores differences in sources and degrees of oppression, and inequities in the availability of resources for seeking redress and empowerment. But fantasies are one thing, and reality is another. Just as reality rarely matches the overreaching dictates of desire, neither do fantasies necessarily direct or predetermine behaviour (though they may persist even as reason and knowledge affect one's experience). Thus, my identification with victims had little bearing on my becoming a 'marginal' cultural producer or (semi-) 'underground' filmmaker, and, although it may have its roots in the generalities of 'adversarial culture' of the 1960s and in an earlier European avant-garde, whatever 'oppositionality' exists in my films has always been, in my mind, of a very restricted order, geared to a very special audience. If my later work has been addressed to women, or sprang from 'oppositionality' to sexism, I had no illusions that it would reach any but an audience schooled in the same formal traditions as I was, i.e., a tiny segment of the white middle class. And, for at least the last fifteen years, I have had no illusions that my work might make significant changes outside of its own narrow sphere. But more on this later. Right now I would rather give you a brief run-down, from my perspective, on the origins of 'Sexism, Colonialism, Misrepresentation: a Corrective Film Series and Conference'. Some of the following you may already know, but it bears repeating.

Some months after the Viewpoints Conference ('Viewpoints: A Conference on Women, Culture, and Public Media') at Hunter College in the fall of 1986 (at which I suggested that in the future people of colour and white people might work together). Bérénice Reynaud and I, during a casual dinner conversation, began to enumerate some of the great films we had seen in the last five or so years that we would have liked to see again, or see on the same programme or series. That list of little over a dozen films eventually materialised as forty, more than half of which were by Third World and First World people of colour. Some of the

African-American films that were included had been screened at the Whitney Museum the year before. Our initial reasoning was that these films should be shown more often and *in a place that would draw audiences who might not ordinarily see them at all*. I use bold italics to emphasise that, from the outset, we had in mind a racially diverse audience, i.e., not only the 'expected' audience for films by and about people of colour, but those who might not ordinarily stray from their accustomed paths to see such films. My membership on the board of directors of the Collective for Living Cinema made that site a logical venue. That the Collective was, 'until quite recently, [a] bastion . . . of overwhelmingly white avant-garde cultural practices', 'seemed all the more reason to hold the event there. (What is the purpose of my being on that board if not to have some effect on the entropic inertia—to put it euphemistically—that perpetuates racial and sexual exclusions, especially at the upper levels, of many white-run cultural organisations? Getting more people of colour on the board is a key issue. Though from your point of view this may be debatable, from mine the ethnic composition of the audience, a by-product of administrative and programming policies, becomes a focal point in the absence of shared power within the institution itself. It's true that the closing of the gender gap in administration and programming has taken priority at the Collective over the closing of the racial gap. [As you yourself acknowledge, this has changed in the last several years.] Racial inequities change more slowly, sometimes out of sheer laziness, or—as Joel Kovel has put it—'aversive', rather than overt, racism.) The Dia Art Foundation, that other 'bastion . . . of . . . [the] white avant-garde', was chosen for two of the panels for three reasons: it had a larger seating capacity; its proximity to the Collective worked well with our tight screening schedule; and I had a previous association with the place, which facilitated access. (We would have presented the first of the three panels there had there not been a conflict of dates.)

Quite frankly, from where I stood, bringing together issues of race and sex as topics for panel discussions seemed important if for no other reason than that, prior to the Viewpoints Conference—and, as far as I knew—it had hadn't been done. I was aware that the priorities of 1970s psychoanalytically-based film theory had been under reassessment within (white and black) feminist cultural circles for some time, but at that point I had little inkling of the potential—always inherent in such a broad-based event—for a race-sex face-off. (It is only quite recently that I have read your review of the Viewpoints Conference in *In These Times*, a review that, in contrast to the one in question, avoided such polarisation.) I was simply thinking that some of the issues that had come up at 'Viewpoints' should be clarified if not developed.

What excited me most, I must admit, was the prospect of seeing 'avant-garde' and 'realist' films screened together, or in the same series, because I have always chafed at what I perceived as the arbitrary demarcations that critics and film festivals often employ to separate narrative

from non-narrative forms while blurring distinctions between the aesthetic and political in addressing issues of 'subversion' and 'transgression' in cinematic practice. Despite the fact that on the festival and funding circuits my own work is usually pegged as 'experimental' and that I've made progressive political claims for certain strategies *qua* anti-narrative with respect to those films, I have at the same time called for a heterogeneity of formal procedures and conventions *within* a given film which might not only obviate formal categories, but engender more complicated, and socially critical, perspectives and access. I don't think it paradoxical that I also have a firm conviction that progressive social positions come in all styles, genres and colours; no one has a corner on radical politics where representational aesthetics is concerned. And, conversely, as you so cogently point out, sexism and racism can be found imbedded in 'avant-garde' methodology. Surrealism and Dada are full of examples of this, from Picasso to Man Ray to Buñuel, also you-know-who: I-mean-there's-no-need-to-mention-here-my-contemporaries-in-media-arts. (Will there ever come a time when the racial and sexual overdeterminations of the 20th century avant-garde are read 'against the grain'?) To confuse matters further, the meaning of the word has a way of shifting: if in some quarters my work, for instance, is seen as a prime example of the avant-garde, in others – where the category is construed in a more purist or autonomous fashion – I suspect I am regarded as an apostate.

Despite all this disputation and ambiguity, I have continued to cling to a remnant of faith, as to a disintegrating barrel in a stormy sea. As much for my own reassurance as for self-justification, I shall take the liberty of quoting a First World white male theorist whose words reflect my current thinking on the subject. Paul Willemen, in a summation of Fernando Solanas's and Octavio Getino's notion of 'Third Cinema', refers to 'its flexibility, its status as research and experimentation, a cinema forever in need of adaptation to the shifting dynamics at work in social struggles'. Though the term 'Third Cinema' was originated by Latin Americans, I don't think I'm being presumptuous in construing 'social struggles' as relevant to specific local, national, racial, and sexual conflicts outside of Latin America. Though he doesn't use the 'A-G word', Willemen's description, inasmuch as it characterises a revolutionary avant-garde, must be very familiar to you.

So, Coco, you can imagine my dismay at finding myself implicated in your megalithic and pejorative construction labelled AVANT GARDE with a vengeance. Dropped higgledy-piggledy into your protoplasmic miasma are the art market, funding agencies, curatorial and archival policies of major museums, feminist film theory, profiteering art galleries, film scholarship, fiscally teetering non-profit film exhibition venues, 1960s radicals, Picasso, filmmakers who make five-minute step-printed super-8 films, and, of course, Bérénice and I (the former, I presume, representing psychoanalysis, or the new A-G, and the latter, Eurocentric art, or the old A-G?). All come under the all-embracing aegis of *THE*

avant-garde, and all share equal culpability for cultural white supremacy. Really now, maybe we should choose sides and fight it out on the volleyball court: People of Colour vs the AVANT-GARDE, with the ghosts of Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Jacques Lacan, and Apollinaire acting as referees and coaches. If you don't mind, include me out.

Pardon my levity, but aren't you overdoing it a little? I agree that all of these agencies and individuals share a racist legacy. That is part and parcel of 'developing' in the western world. But some of them are much more powerful, stable and immovable than others, and some of them are in just as much danger of going down the drain as the agencies and individuals of colour whose interests you suggest are being supplanted or usurped. In other words, 'fantasies of oppositionality' are more fantastical and self-aggrandising and self-perpetuating in some cases than in others. The avant-garde is no more cohesive, fixed, or continuous a thing than that other *bête noire* you mention, that oft-cited nemesis of the A-G: HOLLYWOOD. Your accusation of 're-centring of the avant-garde' is especially odd, given the 'Young, British and Black' film series presented by you shortly after our shindig can be seen as a cutting edge of cultural politics and formal innovation (in a word: avant-garde!), rather than a cross-section of black filmmaking in the UK. (Not that *I'm* complaining! I loved those films.) As for 'the conflation of white, feminist, experimental cinema's supposed oppositionality with that of almost any genre produced by a black or Third World film-maker', and your contention that 'the majority of films in the series were produced by white women from the First World', allow me to set the record straight: out of the forty films we presented, fourteen, or barely a third, were by white First World women and only nine could be classified as 'white, feminist, and experimental'. So what is being 're-centred' here? And what is being conflated with what? (From your perspective would the inclusion of even one First World, white, feminist, experimental film have been proof of such conflation and re-centring?) Why did you single out this particular combination of positions for more opprobrium than, say, the (more numerous) First World white feminists in the series? Much as I dislike playing the self-styled defender of avant-garde honour (I would prefer to leave that to Jonas Mekas) I can't help but point out that if you had allowed us to show one of the 'Young, British, and Black' films, as we had originally planned, perhaps the balance would not have seemed so weighted toward the impression that it is mainly First World white feminists who use experimental, or non-narrative, strategies in their films. Of course, even the most superficial acquaintance with the genre says this ain't so.

Obviously, then, we included the First World white feminist experimental films not just for their aesthetic 'oppositionality' but for their engagement in a particular 'social struggle'. Radical formal procedures ('fetishisation of formal complexity [?']') alone would not have been a reason for selection. But I've already belaboured the A-G more than I intended. If you hadn't so soundly t(h)rashed the not-yet-dead horse, I

would never have attempted so long-winded a resuscitation.

Now, with regard to that more *arriviste* item conflated by you with the avant-garde, namely, feminist psychoanalytic film theory, that's another story. I shall leave that for Bérénice to sort out. Having never main-lined the stuff – only snorted it – I don't feel very comfortable as its exponent. It is interesting to note, however, that only five out of the nine First World White feminist experimental films we showed are of a psychoanalytic bent, or deal with gender *qua* patriarchy. I hope this statistic somewhat defuses the 'reigning concept of patriarchy' that you saw overshadowing our blowout and alleviates your fears of a conspiracy between the (melanin-deficient) A-G and L-Fs (Lacanian feminists), at least where Bérénice's and my project is concerned. Academia, I would concede, may be a different matter.

At worst, our 'Corrective' was a hodgepodge. But definitely not a *putsch*, nor a cabal, nor an avant-garde power play. Which is not to say that, as a team of two white women deploying their combined talents and experience in grant-writing, fund-raising, institutional contacts, feminist and poststructural/post-colonial cultural studies, critical and theoretical writing, and film festival curating, plus credibility with the funding agencies based on almost thirty years' standing as a working artist, Bérénice and I did not wield considerable clout. We *did* wield power. But not to see the limitations and fragility of power operating at our level is to miss an important point. However more advantageous a position than others we may – at the moment – enjoy, due to our race or connections or being in sync with a current funding priority, the fact remains that 'multiculturalism', the latest funding catchword of the day (no matter whom it currently benefits), will be at risk of being replaced or reinterpreted – with consequent white cultural dominance the norm – until white-dominated institutions start, or are forced, to divvy up key positions up and down the hierarchies so that power can be *shared* in a more 'salutary coexistence', as you so well express it. If I seem to be reiterating some of your own articulations, there is a difference: you may think you've met the enemy, but it is not us.

OK then, why did we not find – from the start – a person, or persons, of colour with whom to share our decision-making? All I can say is that we tried. Not hard enough, but we tried. We approached two black women, one in distribution, the other a filmmaker. Possibly the way in which we presented our ideas brought the discussions to nought. (In one case I suspect 'feminism' may have been an unaired bone of contention.) Rather than retreat because no one wanted to play with us, we went ahead, talked to a variety of people, and hoped for the best. Frankly, I always felt queasy on this score. At one level, what we were attempting seemed the height of hubris. At another, after the passage of a year I have few regrets about the selection of films in the series. Our approach generally favoured films constructed from, or sympathetic to, indigenous or ethnic or women's perspectives under colonialist, racist, or sexist conditions. (Does showing such films in the same series suggest these

conditions are equivalent or identical?) We were not interested in screening or analysing films that *unconsciously* demonstrate – or depict unconscious or arguable – racism or sexism, like John Stahl's 1934 *Imitation of Life* or – as you would have liked – the more recent *Born in Flames* (not that I agree with your take on the latter). We did not present any film that suggested an 'against-the-grain' reading or required an exposure of its – latent or otherwise – oppressive bias. In short, we did not knowingly select 'misrepresentations'. This may, as you say, have constituted an oversight, but it also points to another kind of conference, one that you yourself might think about organising, perhaps entitled, 'New Discoveries in Misrepresentation: US Independent Cinema 1960-1990.' (Why not? ... especially if, without outside help, white producers are unable to detect vestiges of racism or dominant ideology in their own films. I hope you don't wait until most of us are dead.) And we didn't show films from Russia or Eastern Europe or the People's Republic of China or India. (We tried to get a Ritwik Ghatak but were foiled by the twin ogres of bureaucracy and telex.)

However, I do regret our not having sought more input from people of colour in our conceptualising of the panels. Unfortunately, due to grant application deadlines, the panel topics and panelists had to be locked in very early on, over a year before the selection of films was finalised. One consequence of this was that the formulation of the panel topics did not adequately reflect the final shape of the film series. Here some of your criticisms would have been very constructive. By the way, you misquote the title of one them: *Responsibility and Strategies in Representing 'the Other'* is the way it should have read. Even back then I felt (on this point I speak for myself; Bérénice has a different take on it) that the problem with using the term 'other', outside of a specified psychoanalytical context, should be indicated by quotation marks. This panel originated in our thinking about the work of Jackie Shearer and Trinh T Minh-Ha (both of whom were on the panel). Jackie's film demonstrates the complexities of a collaboration between black and white filmmakers on a film about black and white working-class subjects, while Minh-Ha dealt with her relationship – as an Asian – to the 'otherness' of Africans. There was no presumption here – and I thought the quotation marks and the composition of the panel would make this clear – that the term was to bear only the simplistic meaning you seem to have ascribed to it in our context, i.e., the Other as anyone not white seen from a (dominant) white perspective.

The issues we ignored and the absence of which you deplore, around the visualisation and sexualisation of racial difference, are of urgent importance and should have been made available by us for discussion from the outset. And I know the absence of a 'representative of white, middle-class First World feminism' on the 'Exclusionary Practices' panel was not offset by the inclusion of Mari-Carmen de Lara, a white, middle-class Third World (Mexican) feminist who spoke of her experiences in making a documentary about working-class women. (But I don't regret

the absence of an avant-garde racial bigot speaking on 'the political expediency of organising without people of colour[!]' I assume you were being ironic.)

Again, speaking for myself, I have to own up to a certain amount of inexperience in organising panels on matters of race (or, for that matter, organising panels period), where I am still a student and have much to learn. But I also feel called upon to chide you, Coco, for not speaking up. You came to all three panels and never once opened your mouth, obviously waiting to 'get' us in print. You had ample opportunity during the proceedings to contribute your criticisms and superior knowledge. (I'm not being sarcastic.) The resulting give-and-take might have been at least as effective as the double-barrelled automatic theory-gun approach encouraged by certain periodicals.

Finally, to struggle toward a place where fantasy and reality may someday converge: if 'unity in opposition' is something to be consigned to fantasy rather than acted out, I fervently hope it will never be entirely banished from that realm. Fantasy can be a springboard and catalyst for action; it is not a blueprint. You quite rightfully point out its dangers. I take with extreme seriousness your concern that 'the current state of affairs bespeaks a lack of respect and recognition of Third World institutions, which translates into biases in funding and a dearth of genuine collaboration in decision making at the level of policy and practice'. If Bérénice's and my work has lent itself to the worsening, rather than the amelioration, of that state of affairs, then all the more pressing a need for us – you, Bérénice and I, and our unexoticised Others – to continue the work that has to be done, support each other, and change, while keeping lines of communication and critical dialogue open, both before and after the fact. (Here I go again with my Utopian dreaming, but why not give utterance to it? After all, we want to build bridges, don't we? Not burn them.) I don't know that I'll do this particular kind of thing again. The higher profile and vulnerability that go with organising are not my cup of tea. But I would hope that our mistakes will not preclude future interchange and that our shared – and sharing of – differences will inspire many 'others' to pick up the ball. There is still so much to be done, by all too few.

For more (differentiated) solidarity than controversy in the future,

Sincerely

Yvonne Rainer

I will try to make my response brief. First, some minor points. It is quite common journalistic practice to remain silent during the events one is covering, and I chose to conform to this rule when covering both the events I comment on in depth in my article. Second, as has been explained several times to Reynaud and Rainer, the distribution agreement with Sankofa and Black Audio concerning 'Young, British and Black' was that all New York screenings would be withheld prior to the tour to avoid diluting press attention. My respondents were not the only programmers disappointed by this decision.

Third, I must decline Reynaud's invitation to publish my article, as I have also declined the Collective for Living Cinema's invitation to join its board of directors (Rainer is president of the board). It would not be wise for me to appear to be so easily recuperable, nor would it be in their interest to continue to attempt to exert power and control over their critic. Indeed, it seems to be more of a time for reflection, if I may venture to suggest, on the very issues of control, co-optation and co-operation that I raised in 'Fantasies of Oppositionality', and that apparently reared their ugly head in the planning and execution of their event.

The two responses succeed in taking a well-worn feminist axiom and turning it on its head – here the political becomes personal, allowing the writers to indulge in fantasies of victimisation. I hardly need to call attention to their frequent use of such terms as 'attack', 'accusation', 'culprit', 'get us'. These fantasies have contributed to a problem of proportion that has resulted in the distortion of the substance as the focus of my piece. I must point out that of the 29 pages of my original manuscript, only five pages dealt with 'Sexism, Colonialism'. Those five pages managed to generate 40 pages of response, including footnotes, published in its entirety in *Screen*, but subject to editorial and space restrictions in *Afterimage*. To respond to these responses, I have been told by *Screen* not to exceed 500 words.

'Fantasies of Oppositionality' was a structural analysis of multicultural programming. In the context of this institutional critique, the examples provided in the article, which were not drawn exclusively from Reynaud's and Rainer's event, served to underscore the general weaknesses and limitations of a particular policy. As such, much of Reynaud's and Rainer's response misses the mark, for neither their motives, their difficulties, nor their aversion to acknowledging the histories inscribed in their positions within the avant-garde, were at issue.

However, that Reynaud and Rainer would choose to identify with the institutions I analysed – to the point of personalising the debate, which in turn leads to their regurgitating the tales of their planning plights and interracial snafus, not to mention their personal histories beyond the event in question – is interesting and quite revelatory in itself. It is, however, to my mind, both unnecessary and inappropriate for public debate, and forecloses cogent discussion of the substantive issues I originally raised.